Jordan Times

An independent Arab political daily published by the Jordan Press Foundation

جوردان تايمز يومية سياسية تصدر بالانكليزية عن المؤسسة الصحفية الاردنية ،الرأي،

Volume 23 Number 6758 AMMAN SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 8, 1998, SHAWWAL 11, 1418 Price: Jordan 200 fils

Palestinians delay announcement of census results

RAMALLAH (AFP) — Results of the Palestinian census will not be announced on Saturday as originally planned, officials said. A press conference scheduled for Saturday morning in the West Bank city of Ramallah was cancelled, but no reason was given, although it is expected to be rescheduled in the next few days. Census officials have said they expect the survey to show significantly higher numbers of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip than Israel has calculated in recent years. There has not been a general census of the West Bank and Gaza Strip since Israel occupied the territories in 1967 but the population has generally been estimated at around 2.5 million, including the Arab residents of Arab east Jerusalem. The publication of the census results has already been postponed several times due to administrative delays, census takers said.

Qatar plans to send plane carrying aid to Iraq

BAGHDAD (R) — Qatar has asked the United Nations for permission to fly a plane loaded with relief aid to sanction-hit Iraq, an Iraqi newspaper said on Saturday. "Qatar has informed the United Nations that it is intending to send a plane loaded with medicine and food to the Iraqi people," Al Qadissiya daily said. It said if the United Nations Sanctions Committee on Iraq ratifies the request Qatar will send the plane this month. Iraq is under stringent trade sanctions imposed on Iraq for its 1990 invasion of Kuwait. Sanctions include a ban on Iraq's oil exports but the U.N. has allowed Baghdad since December 1996 to sell $2 billion worth of oil over six months to buy essential needs for Iraqis. The curbs also ban flights from and to Iraq. Qatar is the only Gulf Arab state with full diplomatic ties with 1991 Gulf war enemy Iraq.

Regent extends support to League efforts in defusing Iraq-U.N. crisis

AMMAN (Petra) — His Royal Highness Crown Prince Hassan, the Regent, Saturday extended Jordan's full support for the efforts of the Arab League secretary general, Esmat Abdul Meguid, to find a peaceful solution to the current crisis between Iraq and the United Nations.

Speaking during a meeting with Dr. Abdul Meguid at the Royal Court, attended by Royal Court Chief Awn Khasawneh and Foreign Minister Fayez Tarawneh, Prince Hassan underlined the important efforts made by Dr. Abdul Meguid as the representative of the Arab leaders, to contain the current crisis and find a peaceful solution to it.

Prince Hassan reiterated Jordan's position calling for the mobilisation of Arab and international efforts, particularly those of the Arab League and the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC), in addition to the U.N. Security Council member states to end the current crisis between Iraq and the U.N.

Dr. Abdul Meguid briefed the Regent on the outcome of his talks in Baghdad and the steps the Arab League will take to ensure a peaceful solution to the crisis.

His Majesty King Hussein and Prince Hassan had earlier warned of the grave consequences resulting from a new military strike against Iraq, and stressed the need for containing the crisis through diplomatic means.



Crown Prince Hassan welcomes at the Royal Palace in Amman on Saturday Arab League Secretary General Esmat Abdul Meguid (Photo by Yousef 'Allan)

Last week, Prince Hassan warned in a TV interview that Iraq and the entire region will not be able to bear the consequences of a new military strike against Iraq, noting that Jordan is making every possible effort to avert such a strike and to secure a peaceful solution to the crisis through ensuring Iraq's observance of international resolutions and protecting the Iraqis from a new strike. Earlier on Saturday, Dr. Abdul Meguid reviewed with the speakers of the Upper and Lower Houses of Parliament, Zeid Rifai and Sa'd Hayel Srour, and members of the Arab and International Affairs Committees in both Houses, the latest developments in the crisis between Iraq and the U.N., in addition to Arab and international efforts to defuse it.

Dr. Abdul Meguid briefed the committee members on the outcome of his talks with Iraqi officials and lauded Jordan's continuous support for the efforts exerted to defuse the crisis.

(Continued on page 3)

After receiving court notification

Government starts procedures to nullify temporary press law

News of PM's determination to enforce High Court ruling promises end to government, paper dispute

By Francesca Ciriaci
Jordan Times Staff Reporter

AMMAN — The government is in the process of issuing an executive order to implement the High Court of Justice's ruling revoking the May 1997 amendments to the Press and Publications Law, the Jordan Times has learned.

A senior official said the government received official notification of the ruling yesterday.

He said it was not yet clear what shape the implementation process will take, since the temporary law was still with Parliament and as such the government could not unilaterally withdraw it.

The controversial amendments to the 1993 press law, widely criticised at home and abroad, are currently before the Lower House's 12-member National Guidance Committee (NGC), upon whose recommendations the House should decide whether to endorse them as ordinary law.

The NGC, however, appears inclined to send the amendments back to the government as a way out of the legal bind, analysts have said.

The senior official said the implementation of the ruling had always been on the government's book, but it had taken time because the Jan.26 ruling itself took time to reach the Council of Ministers through official channels.

The government also needed more time to look at the High Court's verdict from all aspects, the source said, as all rulings concerning government and administrative decisions can either be appealed or have different legal explanations by different parties.

Officials had said earlier that the government planned to contest the High Court's ruling, on the basis that the High Court was not empowered to act as a constitutional court.

However, they added that the 23-member team of Prime Minister Abdul Salam Majali had not yet decided whether it will approach the Court of Cassation or the Higher Council — chaired by the Senate speaker and comprising three senators and five senior judges from the Court of Cassation.

The senior official said the ruling will be put into Dr. Majali issues executive orders on how it should be implemented and the order is published in the Official Gazette.

The High Court's ruling entailed that all decisions taken by the government under the amendments, including the revocation of eight weeklies' licences, were null and void, legal experts have said.

"Some suggested that we should present a new draft, but we do not know yet," the official said.

"What we should keep in mind is that what the court ruled on was not the content of the temporary law, but rather the manner in which the law was passed," he added.

Bilal Tal, head of the Press and Publications Department, said also yesterday that "despite the court's decision, nothing

(Continued on page 7)

Annan persuaded to actively seek diplomatic solution; Germany sides with U.S. against Iraq

Combined agency dispatches

AS IRAQI newspapers accused the United States and Britain Saturday of flouting the will of the international community with threats of military action, Russia continued spearheading the push for a peaceful end to the arms crisis.

U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan has been persuaded by Russia to take an active part in seeking a diplomatic solution to the Iraqi crisis over weapons inspections, an Arab diplomat in Baghdad said Saturday.

"Kofi Annan is joining the dance," the diplomat told AFP.

The diplomat said that Russia has enrolled the secretary general in its diplomatic initiative so that any final solution can be presented under the name of the United Nations and not just one U.N. member.

"Mr. Annan will come to Baghdad when the ideas for ending the crisis are ripe," the diplomat said.

However, German Chancellor Helmut Kohl said here Saturday that Germany stood solidly behind the United States over Iraq and would allow full access to air bases on its territory for any action.

He was reacting to comments from U.S. senators John McCain, Joseph Lieberman and John Warner attending the "Munich Conference on Security Policy" here Saturday, who criticised America's European allies for "lack of support" over a possible U.S. military strike and said this could weaken the NATO alliance.

Mr. Kohl said: "We must show our solidarity for what needs to be done."

"It is quite clear the air bases we have in Germany are and will be available to U.S. troops" for any action

(Continued on page 7)

Turkey to create buffer zone in Iraq if war starts

ANKARA (Agencies) — Turkey plans to send troops into northern Iraq to set up a border buffer zone in the event of a conflict between Washington and Baghdad over U.N. arms inspections, newspapers said on Saturday.

"The cabinet decided that if the United States hits Iraq, the Turkish army will cross the border and create a 15-kilometre buffer zone," the Milliyet daily said, quoting sources inside the meeting. Other papers carried similar reports.

The Turkish army is on alert on the border with Iraq for any military confrontation with the United States in the current standoff over

(Continued on page 3)

No-confidence motion against Mutawi aimed at whole Cabinet — deputy

By Alia A. Toukan
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — The move to oust Minister of State for Information Affairs Samir Mutawi is motivated by lawmakers' discontent with official media policies, parliamentary observers said on Saturday.

"The move is politically motivated," a seasoned politician told the Jordan Times.

The controversy started on Wednesday when 23 deputies cited Jordan Television's (JTV) airing of a song festival, which they saw as "immoral," as grounds for stripping Dr. Mutawi of his portfolio.

At least ten deputies today are expected to present the House with an official motion demanding Dr. Mutawi's removal.

According to Deputy Mohammad Oran, who supports the motion, the move is as much a vote of no-confidence against the government as it is against Dr. Mutawi.

The 23 deputies in the 80-seat chamber are unhappy with the government's handling of major recent events in Jordan, including the Mossad's assassination attempt on Hamas leader Khaled Misha'al in Amman in September, and tough press revisions introduced in May while Parliament was in recess, Dr. Oran told the Jordan Times on Saturday.

But Dr. Mutawi's decision to allow JTV to air the four-day controversial Arab Song Festival that was held in Amman during the Muslim 'Eid Al Fitr, dealt him the severest blow.

In the petition, deputies slammed Dr. Mutawi for approving JTV's decision to co-host the festival — considered "immoral" for showing women with skimpy and revealing dresses — saying it was "contrary to our traditions, ethics, and Islamic heritage, as well as our national standards and tribal norms."

"But the move is primarily in response to Dr. Mutawi's handling of the Misha'al affair and the temporary press and publications law," said Dr. Oran.

All signatories of the petition, who included Islamists, Christians, socialists, and tribal figures, wanted to show their anger at Dr. Mutawi's handling of official media policies, said Dr. Oran, who insisted "the [song] festival is not the issue."

Dr. Oran said at least 10 deputies will submit an official request to the Lower House today to have Dr. Mutawi removed — the minimum number needed under internal regulations for the motion to be considered in Parliament.

However, many believe the deputies will fail in their efforts to muster the 41 votes needed to topple Dr. Mutawi.

"We are aware that we may not be able to gather the votes needed," said Dr. Oran. "But we want to focus attention on the government's media policies."

Despite the uproar, Dr. Mutawi told the Jordan Times on Friday that he "enjoyed the full backing of Prime Minister Abdul Salam Majali." But he refused to comment on whether the move by the deputies was politically motivated.

Dr. Mutawi, who was assigned the delicate information portfolio when Dr. Majali took office in March 1997, came under heavy fire early after he assumed his responsibilities.

During his tenure, the controversial temporary press and publications law was passed resulting in the closure of 13 weeklies and sending the local media up in arms against the government.

The law, was deemed unconstitutional and ordered annulled by the High Court of Justice on Jan. 26. The government initially responded by announcing that it would be contesting the court's decision.

Yesterday, however, a senior official said the government will implement the new ruling.

Dr. Mutawi also came under a barrage of criticism for his handling of the Mossad's aborted attack on Mr. Misha'al on Sept. 25.

For two days he denied reports of the assassination attempt and said it was merely a scuffle between two Canadians and the driver of Mr. Misha'al. Meanwhile, international news agencies and one local newspaper had been reporting the story as it unfolded.

Majali reviews with paper editors Iraqi crisis, Jordan's diplomacy

AMMAN (Petra) — Prime Minister Abdul Salam Majali Saturday reviewed with editors-in-chief and columnists of local newspapers the Kingdom's internal affairs and the latest developments in the region, including the current crisis between Iraq and the United Nations.

The prime minister described Jordan's efforts and contacts in support of a diplomatic solution to the crisis, to save Iraq and the entire region from the real catastrophe which would result from a potential military strike against Iraq.

Reviewing the outcome of meetings held in Baghdad with French and Russian envoys as well as the Arab League secretary general, Dr. Majali said these meetings call for optimism about the possibility of reaching a diplomatic solution.

Dr. Majali answered questions put to him by editors-in-chief and columnists about various issues of concern.

The meeting was attended by Deputy Prime Minister for Service Affairs and Minister of Administrative Development Abdullah Ensour, Deputy Prime Minister for Development Affairs and Minister of State for Prime Ministry Affairs Jawad Al Anani, Foreign Minister Fayez Tarawneh and Information Minister Samir Mutawi, in addition to heads of information departments.

Palestinians, Israelis injured at pro-Iraqi demonstration

BETHLEHEM (AFP) — Eight Palestinians, including two police officers, and two Israeli soldiers were slightly injured Saturday when a pro-Iraqi demonstration by Palestinians turned violent.

"Saddam, Saddam, our friend, strike, strike Tel Aviv," chanted around 1,000 Palestinians referring to Iraqi President Saddam Hussein as they marched with Iraqi flags toward Israeli soldiers.

When Palestinians began throwing rocks, injuring two Israeli soldiers, the army responded with tear gas and rubber-coated bullets, injuring eight Palestinians, witnesses said. Two of the Palestinians injured were police who had intervened to try to prevent the clashes, said the witnesses.

The march to demonstrate solidarity with the Iraqi people against a threatened U.S. attack proceeded from the Dehaisheh refugee camp in the West Bank to the nearby town of Bethlehem.



Palestinian demonstrators sneak behind policemen during clashes Saturday with Israeli troops (AFP photo)

The United States has warned that Iraq will face "substantial" force if it does not allow U.N. weapons inspectors *full* access to suspected arms stockpiles.

But Palestinian President Yasser Arafat's advisor, Ahmad Tibi, told Israel Radio Saturday the Palestinian public was not voicing widespread support for an Iraqi attack on Israel.

President Hussein fired 39 Scud missiles on Israel in the 1991 Gulf war, killing two people.

U.S. airman killed in Gulf collision identified

WASHINGTON (R) — The U.S. Navy on Saturday identified a Marine Corps fighter pilot killed in a mid-air collision in the Gulf as Lieutenant-Colonel Henry Van Winkle from Kirkwood, New York.

Van Winkle, 41, died on Friday when his F/A-18 fighter jet collided with another marine corps F/A-18 in mid-air and crashed in the Gulf.

The pilot of the other plane, 37-year-old Major Cary Venden from Beaufort, South Carolina, survived the crash.

President Bill Clinton said he was saddened by the death. "Lieutenant Colonel Van Winkel was there as part of America's commitment to back up our determined diplomacy with force," the president said in a brief statement.

Israeli soldier, 2 Hizbollah fighters killed in clash in southern Lebanon

TYRE (AFP) — An Israeli soldier was killed and four others wounded early Saturday during Hizbollah attacks in south Lebanon that also claimed the lives of two guerrillas, security sources said.

Hizbollah fighters clashed with an Israeli foot patrol at around 5:30 a.m. local time near an Israeli army position at Blat inside the Israeli-occupied zone in south Lebanon, the sources said.

They said that one of the four soldiers was seriously wounded and that the Israeli casualties were evacuated by helicopter to Israel, but the sources did not have any more information on the Hizbollah deaths.

In Beirut, Hizbollah claimed responsibility, saying several soldiers had died or were wounded during the operation near the international border with Israel. But it did not say if it had suffered any casualties.

It was the first death of an Israeli soldier in south Lebanon this year, while a total of 22 have been wounded in operations led mainly by the Hizbollah Shiite movement.

Following the attack Israeli artillery pounded the areas of Kafra and Yater near the central sector of the zone with about 30 shells, Lebanese police said, but there is no immediate reports of casualties or damage.

The security sources said Hizbollah attacked four Israeli positions.

The Hizbollah statement said its fighters infiltrated the occupied zone despite the fortifications and sophisticated Israeli equipment in an operation to mark the sixth anniversary of the death of "the martyr" Abbas Mussawi.

Algerian minister accuses Iran, some Arab states of helping armed groups

By Tareq Ayyoub
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — Algeria's minister of communications and culture on Saturday accused Iran and unidentified Arab countries of sheltering and helping Algerian armed groups, which the Algerian authorities accuse of massacres that have left more than 25,000 dead in the past six years.

"There are some parties that helped [in the] smuggling of arms across our borders," Hamrawi Habib, who is also government spokesman, told a news conference before concluding a five-day visit to Jordan.

"Some parties took some of our citizens and trained them in Afghanistan. Others trained them in a very dear [Arab] state undercover from the Tehran regime," Mr. Habib charged.

The Algerian official said that his country would not allow any party to interfere in its internal affairs in any way, "whether on the Arab level, Islamic level or the Non-Alignment Movement."

"We do not need any advice or protection from any party but consultation and solidarity," added Mr. Habib.

The minister urged European countries to help in "dismantling" what he described as "terror networks" in their territories.

"Those who want to help Algeria...should help in combating terrorism, dismantling all terror networks and preventing any assistance from reaching these groups," Mr. Habib said.

The Algerian official rejected statements made recently by former Algerian Prime Minister Abdul Hameed Al Ibrahimi accusing the Algerian army of being responsible for the massacres in the former French colony.

"His statements are part of a conspiracy against Algeria and we will never accept such statements," Mr. Habib told reporters.

"These accusations [of involvement by] the army and the government are a pretext to justify terrorist actions and to give hope to those behind them," added Mr. Habib.

The official accused some "business interest lobbies" outside Algeria of masterminding the attacks against the civilians in his country. He did not name these parties.

The Algerian government estimates that more than 25,000 civilians have been killed during the six-year-old bloody conflict between the Algerian military establishment and the armed groups.

During his visit to the Kingdom, Mr. Habib conveyed a message from Algerian President Liamine Zeroual to His Majesty King Hussein when he met His Royal Highness Crown Prince Hassan, the Regent.

He also signed several agreements with Jordan, mainly in the cultural and information fields.

The Algerian president visited Amman last year and held talks with King Hussein on ways to combat terrorism in Algeria and bilateral ties between the two states.



COMMANDOS ON U.S. CARRIER: **Unidentified United States special forces commandos Saturday make their way across the flight deck of the aircraft carrier USS Independence as they go to board a helicopter. The USS Independence joins the George Washington and the Nimitz in the northern Gulf, and all three ships are flying operations enforcing Operation Southern Watch over Iraq (Reuters photo)**

Algerian MPs attack government security over ongoing bloodshed

ALGIERS (AFP) — Algerian MPs lashed out at government security measures to tackle the suspected Islamist violence, which left 10 civilians and 15 armed militants dead in two days, press and security force reports said.

The latest civilian deaths occurred early Saturday as two bombs exploded within hours of each other in an apartment block in Blida, 50 kilometres south of Algiers, and in a cafe in Mahelma, southwest of Algiers, security forces reported.

The blast in Blida left two dead and four injured, while three were killed and eight wounded in the explosion in Mahelma.

Two passengers were also killed and four injured when a bomb exploded against a passing train near Chebli, 20 kilometres south of Algiers on Friday, press reports said.

A nine-year-old girl was blown apart and two members of her family critically wounded when a bomb went off at Bouachoune, near Medea, south of the capital, the reports said.

Two people had their throats cut not far from the same place at a fake roadblock, they added.

Saturday's press reports also detailed the shooting of 15 armed Islamists on Thursday and Friday, including 11 killed in a security sweep in a forest near Blida, south of Algiers.

The others were killed at Tiaret, southwest of Algiers, Saida and near Jijel, east of the capital.

None of the deaths were announced by the security forces.

The latest killings, amid a wave of violence which intensified since the fasting month of Ramadan, pushed Algerian members of parliament on all sides to harangue government leader Ahmad Ouyahia about security measures.

Mr. Ouyahia sought to reassure parliament Friday that his government was pursuing the battle against the suspected extremists — called "terrorists" by President Liamine Zeroual's regime, which came to power in 1992 after cancelling elections the Islamic Salvation Front was poised to win.

In January alone, he said, 150 self-defence groups of armed civilians had been established. Around 5,000 such groups are already active in the north African state.

But a deputy from his own National Rally for Democracy (RND) party, Abdelaziz Ben Mehidi, warned that the fate of the government lay in parliament's hands.

He criticised the government's failure to fend off "the political offensive" from abroad, a reference to steps taken by the European Union (EU) in particular.

On Sunday a delegation of nine EU deputies begin a five-day visit in Algiers, but this will not be "an inquiry nor an investigation" said the mission leader Andre Soulier, from France.

The team will meet parliamentary parties, officials, families of massacre victims, and other civilians.

But Mr. Ouyahia reiterated his government's refusal to accept outside "meddling," meaning an inquiry or humanitarian aid.

His position was countered by the Socialist Forces Front, which called for an international investigation into the massacres and foreign aid.

Criticism continued as Abderrekaz Mokri, of the Society for Peace Movement, charged: "You have failed in your way of running the country and in all other areas."

Mr. Ben Mehidi demanded more "credibility and efficiency on the ground" from the government.

The Zeroual regime systematically rejects proposals for an outside inquiry into the massacres. Death tolls in the Islamist insurgency stand at 70,000 according to U.S. State Department estimates, a figure slammed by Algiers as exaggerated.

Cyprus presidential election puts island's 24-year division in focus

NICOSIA (AFP) — The people of Cyprus will cast their votes on Sunday in a presidential election that could hold the key to solving the island's bitter 24-year division and deciding its future course in Europe.

But the campaign has been marked by mud-slinging and vitriolic personal attacks rather than in-depth debate on the main issues.

Voting is mandatory for Cyprus' nearly 447,000 registered voters, including for the first time young people who were not yet born when the island was divided in 1974 following Turkey's invasion of the northern third.

Incumbent Glafcos Clerides, at 78 the oldest of the seven candidates, is running neck-and-neck with George Iacovou, his main challenger who is almost 20 years younger.

Mr. Clerides, who despite his age has found strong support among young voters, describes himself as the "continuity" candidate and has told voters he has a "good chance" of finding a settlement of the Cyprus problem during 1998.

Opinion polls show only a few hundred votes separate Clerides — the founder of the right-wing Disy Party who won by a margin of less than half a per cent five years ago — and 59-year-old Mr. Iacovou.

A second round of voting will be held on Feb. 15 if no candidate secures at least 51 per cent of the vote.

Mr. Iacovou, standing as an independent, is backed by Cyprus powerful Communist Party and has secured the endorsement of the centre-right Diko Party which helped Mr. Clerides to his narrow victory in 1993.

Unsurprisingly, the 19-year age difference has been a recurring theme for the Iacovou campaign.

"I want a young president," declare his campaign advertisements.

The Clerides campaign team has sought to make an advantage out of necessity by shifting the question from age to experience.

Campaign advertisements stress his long experience and personal familiarity with world leaders and urge voters to make a "responsible choice."

Both candidates have also made adverts specifically targeted at young people. The voting age has been lowered from 21 to 18 for the first time, bringing a crucial 17,000 new voters into the equation.

A recent opinion poll suggested the majority of them would vote for Mr. Clerides, a man almost four times their age.

The other contenders who lag far behind in the polls are former president George Vassiliou, 66, of the United Democrats; Vassos Lyssarides, 77, of the Socialist Party Edek; Nicos Rolandis, 65, of the Liberal Party; Alexis Galanos, 57, a rebel Diko leader and Nicos Koutsou, 51, of the New Horizons Party.

March is due to see the resumption of talks between Cyprus's divided Greek and Turkish communities, which United Nations mediators have kept on hold pending the election's outcome.

The European Union is also due to open membership talks with the new Cypriot government on March 30, a move that has been strongly opposed by both Turkey and the Turkish-Cypriot leadership.

They argue that the internationally-recognised government in Nicosia represents only the Greek-Cypriot community.

Both Ankara and the leadership of the Turkish-Cypriot community refuse to countenance participation in the membership talks unless the EU first recognises the breakaway Turkish-Cypriot state in the north.

Turkey invaded northern Cyprus in 1974 following a Greek-Cypriot coup aimed at uniting the island with Greece. The Turkish-Cypriots declared the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus in 1983, but it is recognised only by Ankara.

Egypt highlights progress, Yemen calls for diplomacy to end Iraq crisis

Combined agency dispatches

EGYPTIAN FOREIGN Minister Amr Musa said on Saturday that progress has been achieved on the diplomatic front to defuse Iraq's crisis with the United Nations over arms inspections.

"I can say that certain progress was achieved in the political and diplomatic efforts," Mr. Musa told reporters without elaborating.

Mr. Musa was speaking before leaving for Morocco and France for talks with officials there on ways of solving the crisis.

"The diplomatic efforts deployed currently by Egypt and the international community are not only submitted to Baghdad but also to the United Nations and the United States," Mr. Musa said.

"It is an attempt to find understanding which will be accepted by all the parties," he said.

Mr. Musa will give Moroccan King Hassan II a message from Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak on the Iraqi crisis as well as developments in the Middle East peace process.

He will then head to Paris for talks with French Foreign Minister Hubert Vedrine on ways to find a peaceful solution to the Iraq arms standoff.

The United States and Britain have threatened to launch a military strike if Iraqi President Saddam Hussein persists in his refusal to allow U.N. inspectors to search so-called presidential sites suspected of hiding banned weapons. President Mubarak has appealed to President Hussein to "act wisely" and warned that a U.S. military strike against Baghdad for its refusal to open up presidential palaces for weapons inspections was "still on the agenda."

Yemen also called Saturday for the deepening crisis between Iraq and United Nations weapons inspectors to be settled through diplomacy.

"Yemen reaffirms its stance in favour of peaceful resolution of the crisis, which would avoid the need to use force, and emphasises the need for diplomatic efforts," said Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh.

The official SABA news agency said Mr. Saleh made the comments after receiving an Iraqi envoy who handed over a message from Iraqi president.

The United States, backed by Britain, has threatened to launch a military strike if Iraq does not offer unconditional cooperation to U.N. inspectors searching for Iraqi weapons of mass destruction.

Mr. Saleh's ruling General People's Congress (GPC) and seven opposition parties also issued a statement Saturday calling on Arab countries to allow their citizens to volunteer to defend Iraq.

The statement said that any aggression against Iraq should be considered "an aggression against the Arab and Islamic Nation [which] cannot allow its security to be threatened and its dignity to be trampled upon."

It also called on all Arab countries not to allow their territory to be used for any attack on Iraq.

JORDAN TELEVISION

Tel. 773111-19

PROGRAMME TWO

16:10 ...Cartoon — Pink Panther
16:30 French Programmes
18:00 Children's Programme — Skippy
18:30 Drama — Broder Town
19:00 Le Journal
19:15 Doc. — Le Tour de France
19:30 News Headlines
19:33 America's Funniest Home Video
20:00 ... Documentary — Killing for a Living
21:10 Renegade
22:00 News in English
22:30 Best Seller — North and South
23:59 ...Comedy — Dad's Army

PRAYER TIMES

05:02.....Fajr
06:21 (Sunrise) Duha
11:50 Dhuhr
14:52'Asr
17:19.....Maghreb
18:37.....'Isha

CHURCHES

St. Mary of Nazareth Church Sweifieh, Tel. 810740
Assemblies of God Church Tel. 632785.
St. Joseph Church Tel. 624590
Church of the Annunication Tel. 637440.
De la Salle Church Tel. 661757.
Terra Sancta Church Tel. 622366
Anglican Church Tel. 652826.
Armenian Catholic Church Tel. 771331.
Armenian Orthodox Church Tel. 775261.
St. Ephraim Church Tel. 771751.
Amman International Church Tel.865897
Evangelical Lutheran Church Tel. 824328.
German-speaking Evangelical Congregation Tel. 688404
The Latter-Day Saints Tel. 654932.
Church of Nazarene Tel. 675691.
The Evangelical Local Church in Amman Tel. 811295
English-speaking
Latin Catholics Parish Tel. 614190.

JORDAN TIMES DAILY GUIDE AND CALENDAR

WEATHER

Bulletin supplied by the Department of Meteorology

Relative cold weather conditions will prevail with rainfall expected at intervals in different parts of the Kingdom. Temperatures will drop further and winds westerly to northwesterly active. On Monday, the effect of the depression will lessen, while relative cold will continue to prevail and skies remaining partly cloudy. In Aqaba, skies will be partly cloudy with a chance of scattered showers, winds northerly moderate to active, and seas choppy.

Min./Max. temp.
Amman.....06/12
Aqaba.....10/20
Deserts.....04/14
Jordan Valley.....09/18

Yesterday's high temperatures: Amman 15, Aqaba 24. Humidity readings: Amman 79 per cent, Aqaba 42 per cent.

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

NIGHT DUTY

AMMAN:
Dr. Hanna Mansour 758863
Dr. Afif Shukri 898863
Dr. Nidal Al Dahleh 827195
Dr. Sa'id Tawfiq 788285
Firas pharmacy 661912
Ferdows pharmacy 778336
Al Asema pharmacy 637055
Nairoukh pharmacy 623672
Al Salam pharmacy 636730
Yacoub pharmacy 644945
Shmeisani pharmacy 637660
Najib pharmacy 847632
IRBID:
Dr. Ahmad Qanu 281484
Al Quds pharmacy(—)
ZARQA:
Dr. Ratib Atallah 994424
Khalifeh pharmacy 985417

EMERGENCIES

Food Control Centre.....637111
Civil Defence Department 5661111
Civil Defence Immediate Rescue 630341
Civil Defence Emergency.....199
Rescue Police.....192, 621111, 637777
Fire Brigade.....617101
Blood Bank.....775121
Highway Police.....843402
Traffic Police.....896390
Public Security Dept..... 630321
Hotel Complaints.....5605800
Price Complaints.....5661176
Water & Sewerage Complaints ..897467
Amman Municipality Complaints 787111
Telephone Information (directory assistance) 121
Overseas Calls 010230
Central Amman Telephone Repairs 623101
Abdali Tel. Repairs.....5661101
Jordan Television 773111
Radio Jordan 774111
Water Authority 5680100
J. Electricity Authority 815615
Electric Power Co.....636381
RJ Flight Information ..44-53200
Queen Alia Intl. Airport 44-53200

HOSPITALS

AMMAN:
Hussein Medical Centre 813813/32
Khalidi Maternity..... 644281/6
Akileh Maternity.....642441/2
Jabal Amman Maternity ...642362
Malhas, J. Amman 636140
Palestine, Shmeisani 5607071
Shmeisani Hospital 5669131
University Hospital 845845
Al-Muasher Hospital ..56672227/9
The Islamic, Abdali ...5666126/37
Al-Ahli, Abdali 5664164/6
Italian, Al-Muhajreen 777101/3
Al-Bashir.....775111/26
Army, Marka 891611/15
Queen Alia Hospital ..5602240/50
Amal Hospital 5674155
The Arab Centre for Heart and Special Surgery 865199

ZARQA:
Zarqa Govt. Hospital(09)983323
Zarqa National Hospital(09)900560
Ibn Sina Hospital.... (09)986732
Al Hikma Modern Hospital(09)990990
IRBID:
Princess Basma Hospital(02)275555
Greek Catholic Hospital(02)272275
Ibn Al Nafees Hospital(02)247100

AQABA:
Princess Haya Hospital (03)314111

FOR THE TRAVELLER
QUEEN ALIA INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

This information is supplied by Royal Jordanian (RJ) information department at the Queen Alia International Airport Tel. (44) 53200-5, where it should always be verified. Information on other flights can be supplied on phone (44) (52700)

ARRIVALS

Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights
07:30 Larnaca (RJ)
08:25 Bombay (RJ)
08:35 Jeddah (RJ)
09:15 Dhahran, Riyadh (RJ)
09:50 Dubai, Abu Dhabi (RJ)
10:05 Beirut (RJ)
16:45 New York, Amsterdam (RJ)
17:00 Brussels, Geneva (RJ)
17:05 Paris (RJ)
17:30 Madrid, Athens (RJ)
17:45 London (RJ)
20:30 Rome (RJ)
21:00 Frankfurt (RJ)
22:50 Vienna, Aqaba (RJ)
00:05 Cairo (RJ)
04:00 Jeddah (RJ)

Other Flights
03:25 Rome (AZ)
10:00 Sanaa (IY)
12:25 Bahrain (GF)
13:00 Moscow (SU)
15:00 Doha (QR)
17:45 Jeddah (SV)
20:00 Tel Aviv (LY)
20:40 Cairo (MS)
23:10 Istanbul (TK)

Royal Wings (RW)
07:45 Aqaba (RW)
09:05 Amman (QAIA) (RW)
09:50 Amman (Marka Airport) (RW)
17:20 Tel Aviv (RW)
18:30 Amman (QAIA) (RW)
21:20 Aqaba (RW)
22:50 Amman (Marka Airport) (RW)

DEPARTURES

Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights
06:20 Beirut (RJ)
09:15 Vienna, Frankfurt (RJ)
10:20 Aqaba, Vienna (RJ)
11:00 Athens, Rome (RJ)
11:30 ...Amsterdam, New York (RJ)
11:50 Tunis, Casablanca (RJ)
12:15 London (RJ)
20:10 Cairo (RJ)
20:30 New Delhi (RJ)
20:40 Damascus (RJ)
21:00 Jeddah (RJ)
21:00 Abu Dhabi, Dubai (RJ)
22:30 Bangkok (RJ)
23:00 Kuala Lumpur (RJ)
23:00.....Jeddah (add) (RJ)
00:20 Sanaa (RJ)

Other Flights
03:00 Athens (OA)
04:20 Rome (AZ)
06:40 Beirut, London (BA)
07:50 London (BA)
11:00 Sanaa (IY)
13:15 Doha (GF)
14:50 Moscow (SU)
16:00 Doha (QR)
19:15 Jeddah (SV)
21:20 Tel Aviv (LY)
21:40 Cairo (MS)

Royal Wings (RW)
06:45 Amman (Marka Airport) (RW)
08:15 Aqaba (RW)
09:30 Amman (QAIA) (RW)
16:45 Amman (Marka Airport) (RW)
17:55 Tel Aviv (RW)
20:30 Amman (QAIA) (RW)
21:50 Aqaba (RW)



REGENT CHAIRS MEETING: HRH Crown Prince Hassan, the Regent, on Saturday chairs part of the meeting of governors at the Ministry of Interior. Earlier, the Regent inaugurated the Family Protection Unit at the Public Security Department (PSD). Prince Hassan underlined the importance of this unit as a pilot project that will contribute to preventing sexual offences against women and child abuse. The Prince ended his field tour with a visit to the Anti-Narcotics Department, where he met with its director and staff (Photo by Boghos)

French ambassador says his country seeking diplomatic solution to Iraq-U.N. crisis

AMMAN (Petra) — French Ambassador to Jordan Bernard Bajolet said Saturday that his country is sparing no effort in seeking a diplomatic solution to the Iraq-U.N. crisis.

France has proposed a formula to enable the U.N. inspectors to enter the Iraqi presidential sites, Mr. Bajolet said, noting that inspections will not cover those locations used as living quarters because Iraq's dignity and sovereignty should be respected.

The French plan has a common denominator with the Russian proposals, "and I believe that all the U.N. Security Council members will accept it," he stated.

Noting that the Iraqis took a step forward when they accepted the main elements of the French plan, Mr. Bajolet said "it is hoped that the plan will now be accepted by all the Security Council members."

The ambassador said French envoy Jean Calud Coseran, who heads the North Africa and Middle East desk at the French Foreign Ministry, will arrive here today to explain France's plans to the Jordanian government and to discuss the situation.

"We attach great importance to Jordan's views because Jordan is one of the main concerned parties in the present crisis," the ambassador said.

Mr. Bajolet said France "does not support the idea of a military strike against Iraq, as this would not solve the problem but could further aggravate the situation and would result in heavy loss of life."

"However, we have noticed that the U.S. and Britain are determined to use force should diplomacy fail," said the ambassador.

He expressed the view that the only way to avert a disaster is for Iraq to offer an acceptable initiative.

Mr. Bajolet said that if Iraq accepts the French plan, it will safeguard its sovereignty and fulfil the U.N. demands, thus averting a war.

Police questioning 25-year-old over shooting incident

By Rana Husseini
Jordan Times Staff Reporter

AMMAN — Police are questioning a 25-year-old man who Saturday accidentally shot and seriously injured his friend in the Wihdat area, according to official sources.

Usama K. was handling an unlicensed gun in his shop located on Madaba Street when two of his friends entered the shop, one source said.

"Usama started waving his gun at his friends when a bullet was accidentally fired, striking his friend Ahmad M., 23, in the shoulder," the source told the Jordan Times.

The victim was rushed to Al Bashir Hospital, where the attending doctors said he was listed in critical condition.

The source added that Prosecutor Imad Kilani is handling the case and is questioning the parties involved to determine if the shooting was accidental or not.

Police contacted by the Jordan Times Saturday evening said they have arrested Usama K. and are still investigating the incident.

In another incident in the Kingdom on Saturday, nine workers who were cleaning a well in an aluminium factory near Jiza town, next to Queen Alia International Airport, were treated at the same hospital for paint thinner inhalation, according to Civil Defence Department (CDD) officials.

A CDD official told the Jordan Times Saturday that three of the nine workers descended to the bottom of seven-metre well to clean it and fainted, "prompting their remaining six friends to attempt to rescue them but they also fainted."

"The workers were overcome by lack of oxygen and because they used huge amounts of thinner inside the well," the CDD official said.

All nine workers were pulled by CDD rescue teams and were taken to Al Bashir Hospital, where they were all listed in fair condition.

Meanwhile, police Friday announced the arrest of 33-year-old man who reportedly confessed to murdering then burning his father in the Qweismeh area over financial problems on Thursday, according to official sources.

Salem Salamah, 75, was found burnt beyond recognition in a valley in the Ma'adi neighbourhood. Coroners, however, determined that the man died from several injuries to the head caused by a sharp object.

The son, who was not identified by authorities, reportedly told police that he killed his father because he would not help him financially and because he refused to lend him JD30, the source said.

At around 3:00 a.m. Thursday morning, the source maintained, the suspect brought an axe and struck his sleeping father four times in the head, dragged his body to the valley, set him on fire and fled the scene.

According to the source, the suspect confessed to committing the murder and re-enacted his crime.

Former Syrian president buried in Amman

AMMAN (J.T.) — The body of the former Syrian President Nazim Kudsi, who died in Amman Friday at age 91, was laid to rest Saturday at noon at the Umm Al Hiran cemetery.

His Royal Highness Crown Prince Hassan, the Regent, delegated Chief Chamberlain Prince Ra'd Ben Zeid to convey his condolences to the Kudsi family and to take part in the funeral.

Mr. Kudsi ruled Syria from 1961 on the dissolution of the short-lived union between Egypt and Syria until 1963, when the Ba'ath party, which still rules Syria, rose to power.

Mr. Kudsi began his political life in 1932 as a member of the National Bloc and moved up the political ladder until he was appointed foreign minister in 1950 and prime minister later the same year.

The former president, who has seven sons and daughters, moved to Lebanon after his removal from office where he lived until 1986, when he moved to Amman.

Cabinet briefed on prime minister's talks with Arab League secretary general

AMMAN (J.T.) — Minister of State for Information Affairs Samir Mutawi on Saturday said Prime Minister Abdul Salam Majali briefed the Cabinet on the outcome of his talks with Arab League Secretary General Esmat Abdul Meguid and the results of Dr. Abdul Meguid's recent talks with the Iraqi leadership to find a peaceful solution to the Iraq-U.N. crisis.

Dr. Abdul Meguid told the prime minister that Iraq showed flexibility and that the Arab World is seeking a settlement to prevent a military strike.

"Within the Arab League's framework lies the Arab Summit institution, currently chaired by Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, and what Dr. Abdul Meguid has done falls within the context of the summit's endeavours to find a diplomatic solution to the crisis," according to Dr. Mutawi after the regular Cabinet session.

Asked about the government's views regarding the spate of crimes and murders committed recently in Amman, Dr. Mutawi said the concerned departments are intensifying their efforts to solve these cases and to refer those responsible to court.

The Council of Ministers approved a decision by the Higher Council for Promoting Investments to exempt exports by public shareholding companies from income tax.

The Council's statement said all companies restricting their operations to exporting or promoting the export of Jordanian products abroad will benefit from this decision, provided their capitals are at least JD2 million.

Also under the decision, profits made by these companies will be exempt from income tax on all operations outside the Kingdom.

The Council of Ministers decided to form a delegation to attend the international youth week due to be held in Ankara in May and another delegation, led by Minister of Agriculture Mijhem Khreisha, to attend the general assembly meeting of the Arab Organisation for Agricultural Development to be held in Cairo on Feb. 21.

Another delegation was formed to attend a regional meeting on agriculture to be held in Damascus on March 21.

Canadian envoy meets with Badran as part of discussions on refugees' situation

AMMAN (J.T.) — The special coordinator for the peace process at the Canadian Foreign Ministry, Andrew Robinson, met Saturday with Ibrahim Badran, director general of the Department of Palestinian Affairs, and said his visit was part of a regional tour to discuss the situation of Palestinian refugees in Arab host countries.

Mr. Robinson was quoted by the Jordan News Agency, Petra, as saying that he and Dr. Badran reviewed issues connected with the daily life of the Palestinian refugees. He also voiced his appreciation of Jordan's endeavours to help the refugees and alleviate their sufferings.

According to a statement after the meeting, Mr. Robinson and Dr. Badran also reviewed the contributions of donor nations to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA).

The two emphasised the need to support the agency's role and boost its services to refugees, pointing out that Jordan has been shouldering a major burden in caring for the refugees.

HRH Crown Prince Hassan, the Regent, has said Jordan annually spends almost as much as UNRWA for the care of the refugees in the Kingdom.

Dr. Badran said they examined Jordan's endeavours for the refugees and a JD431 million government-sponsored social safety net plan, under which JD173 million will be spent on the infrastructure of the Kingdom's 13 refugee camps within the framework of improving less developed regions.

Prince Hassan told refugees at the Wihdat Camp last month that the social safety package will be non-discriminatory and will target refugee camps as well as underdeveloped areas of Jordan's rural and urban regions.

Dr. Badran said Mr. Robinson expressed understanding and appreciation of Jordan's role in helping improve the living conditions of the Palestinian refugees, according to the statement.

The statement said that both sides underlined the importance of enabling UNRWA to pursue its social, educational, vocational training and health services to the refugees.

Mr. Robinson's tour was a demonstration of Canada's concern over the refugee issue, Dr. Badran said, noting that Canada chairs the working group on the refugees in the multilateral phase of the Middle East peace process.

Local Internet users utilising service feature for low-cost calls

By Ahmed Naser
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — Local Internet subscribers are breaking the monopoly of the Jordan Telecommunications Company (JTC) by making international phone calls via the Internet at a fraction of the rates charged by the state-run company.

Under the 1995 Telecommunications Law, Internet Service Providers (ISPs) are banned from offering telephony and any advice on its operation. Violations are punishable by a maximum of three months imprisonment or fines between JD100 and JD1,000.

The JTC, awaiting privatisation, has a monopoly on international circuits and voice communication until Dec. 31, 2002.

However, Jordanians accessing the Internet are conducting telephony, or voice communication via the Internet, and neither the JTC nor the ISPs can stop them, officials said.

Yousef Abu Jamouse, director general of the Telecommunications Regulatory Commission (TRC), said regulators around the world faced similar problems.

"We are coordinating with them to find a solution," he told the Jordan Times. "But you cannot stop this violation without hindering the flow of information."

To curb telephony, the TRC would need massive manpower and intrusion on ISPs' internal affairs, which would lead to a sharp increase in Internet connection costs, Mr. Abu Jamouse said.

"This goes against the TRC's main aim of making communication services accessible to consumers at affordable prices."

Calling through the Web to regular telephones abroad is available by subscription at low up-front fees — ranging from JD0.07 to JD0.75 per minute.

In contrast, voice communication on the Internet only requires that all parties have the same software, most of which is available free-of-charge on the Internet.

Both software and services are advertised on the Internet while the most popular net-to-phone services include: "Net-2-phone" and "Freetel." Microsoft Net Meeting, Vox Chat and Phone, and Netscape CoolTalk are among the most used brands of Web phone software.

However, international calls through the Internet are far from convenient in Jordan, where surfers always complain of the low quality of Web connections, including the time needed to log on and connection speed.

Ultra-fast 56K modems, hooked onto local lines to access the Web, provide poor connections in Jordan, mainly because of the low performance of installed copper lines. Hence, pictures and sounds, which make up a large portion of Internet content, take a long time to download or view.

A simple "hello" travels through the Internet in the form of digitally encoded data, which must be decoded upon its reception.

Therefore, hardware performance and the quality and speed of connections play a definitive role in "what you hear and how you hear it," said Nader Jadallah, a computer hardware engineer and Web hobbyist.

But because of the poor quality of local lines, speech might arrive distorted.

Despite the service's low cost, investment in a suitably equipped computer system is needed to utilise it.

Adequate computer hardware could include a powerful IBM-compatible Pentium or Macintosh PowerPC processor, with at least 32 megabytes RAM. More importantly, a full duplex sound card enabling simultaneous transmission and reception of voice and a modem that can connect at a speed of at least 28.8K are needed.

A telephony ready computer costs an average of JD900 for IBM compatibles and around JD2,000 for a Macintosh.

Over 80 million Internet users are scattered across the globe, with the majority in the United States, followed by Europe and Eastern Asia.

However, the craze in the Middle East is growing at snail's pace because of the Internet's English language predominance and computer illiteracy. Various forms of restrictions imposed by governments are another hindrance.

Internet communication software like IRC and ICQ that enable live chats through screens, net-to-phone services and web-phone services are making geographical distances shorter, but most importantly monopoly over communications much harder.

Lecture focuses on urban aspects of Amman Citadel

By Suha Ma'ayeh
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — A recent lecture given at Instituto Cervantes entitled "Urban Development at the Amman Citadel" focused on aspects of the urban structure as well as advances in the restoration of the Umayyad period Citadel, taking into account recent discoveries.

Ignacio Arce, director of the restoration works at the Citadel and an architect from the International Centre for the Study and Preservation of Cultural Property (ICCROM/UNESCO) in Rome, stated that his research and excavations were carried out in cooperation with the Department of Tourism and Antiquities and the Spanish Archaeological Mission.

"The transformation of the first settlements into a real city seems to have taken place at the end of early Bronze period," according to Mr. Arce.

"The Ammonite tell probably combined defensive, religious and probably also residential functions as well, although there is little evidence apart from some tombs and some sections of the city walls," he continued.

The Spanish architect said the inclusion of the city and the whole region in the Roman Empire meant the beginning of great changes in urban planning.

"The new urban policy implied a specialisation of the different areas of the city. The citadel became a sacred pagan precinct, a real acropolis, while the lower city was the frame for civic life," Mr. Arce said.

He added that during the Byzantine period and as a result of the adoption of Christianity, the pagan temples became quarries for building materials for churches and other structures.

"The establishment of the caliphate's new capital in nearby Damascus and Amman's location were determining factors in the city being designated as capital of the Balqa region," he said.

Mr. Arce said one of the most distinguished features of the Amman Citadel during the Umayyad period is the construction of the palace itself and the central area, which comprised the souq square, the mosque and related areas.

He said Islamic cities of that period were comprised of a main centre made up of a religious cultural centre (mosque), a closely linked commercial centre (souq), and the political administrative centre (palace).

They also featured a system of main streets stemming out from the centre, with the secondary street system surrounded by dwelling quarters, which in turn was encircled by a defensive wall system.

Turkey to create buffer zone in Iraq if war starts

(Continued from page 1)

U.N. arms inspectors, Turkish Deputy Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit said Saturday.

"Turkish troops are on the alert for any eventuality," Mr. Ecevit said in a live broadcast on the Turkish television channel NTV, without saying when the state of alert had begun.

Turkey's cabinet met late on Friday to discuss the crisis in Iraq and announced it was to prepare to provide emergency humanitarian aid for a possible wave of refugees fleeing the fighting.

Turkey was swamped with Kurdish refugees seeking to leave Iraq at the end of the 1991 Gulf war. Turkey helped Western powers set up a Kurdish "safe haven" in the north of Iraq to deal with the problem.

Ankara has launched several cross-border raids into northern Iraq in recent years to fight Turkish Kurds rebels based there.

The Kurdish enclave in northern Iraq has been outside Baghdad's control since an uprising by the Kurds against Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's government at the end of the 1991 Gulf war.

Turkey says the power vacuum there allows Turkish Kurd guerrillas of the Kurdish Labour Party (PKK) to use the mountainous area to strike at targets inside Turkey.

More than 27,000 people have been killed in the 13-year conflict between Turkish troops and the PKK, fighting for self-rule in Turkey's southeast.

Nato-member Turkey is host to a U.S.-led air force enforcing a no-fly zone in the north of Iraq.

U.S. planes based at Incirlik in southern Turkey launched frequent bombing strikes on Iraq during the Gulf war but they have not taken part in subsequent strikes by Washington.

Both Turkish and U.S. officials deny there has been any request to use the base for raids on Iraq should there be any escalation in the crisis with Baghdad over U.N. arms inspectors.

Regent extends support to League efforts

(Continued from page 1)

Later in the day, Dr. Abdul Meguid left for Cairo and was seen off by Foreign Minister Fayez Tarawneh and other officials.

In remarks to the press after Dr. Abdul Meguid's departure, Dr. Tarawneh said that the Arab League secretary general's visit to Iraq was of paramount importance.

"We want to intensify our diplomatic efforts because finding a peaceful solution is our sole option. Otherwise the consequences would be detrimental to the Iraqi people, to Jordan and the region as a whole," said Dr. Tarawneh.

Noting that Dr. Abdul Meguid will pursue his efforts, Dr. Tarawneh said that all other concerned parties are pooling their efforts because the situation remains very dangerous.

Referring to the foreign initiatives he said that the French and the Russian proposals are very similar adding that "we will receive a French envoy on Monday to pursue consultations in a bid to reach a solution."

Noting that time is an important factor under the present circumstances, Dr. Tarawneh said that Prince Hassan's contact with Iranian President Mohammad Khatami was within the framework of Jordan's relentless efforts to help find an acceptable formula to end the crisis.

He said that the intensive efforts in Baghdad have so far resulted in some positive indicators but talks will continue to find a final solution.

what's going on

FILMS

* "Pauline à la plage" at the French Cultural Centre, Jabal Weibdeh on Monday, Feb. 9, at 6:30 p.m. and 8:30 p.m.
* Video film (in English) on studying at German universities (parts I and II) at Goethe-Institut, Jabal Amman at 4:30 p.m.

EXHIBITIONS

* Valentine's Day bazaar at Jordan Design and Trade Centre of Noor Al Hussein Foundation, off Wadi Saqra Street (Tel. 699141/2), until Feb. 14.
* Private collection of Mamdouh Bisharat entitled "A Vision, An Identity" at Darat Al Funun, Jabal Weibdeh, until March 5 (Tel. 6432511). Also displaying works by contemporary Arab artists — "The New Collection."
* "History of Cartoon Drawings" at the French Cultural Centre, Jabal Weibdeh, until Feb 26.
* Works by about a hundred artists from Iraq, Syria, Sudan, Lebanon and Jordan at Hammurabi Art Gallery, Gardens Street, until Feb. 20 (Tel. 553606981).

LECTURE

* Lecture (in Arabic) by Syrian novelist Nabil Suleiman about the new turning point in Arabic novels and his own personal experience at Darat Al Funun, Jabal Weibdeh at 6:00 p.m.

Rescue operation begins, more than 4,000 feared killed in Afghan quake

KABUL (AFP) — A massive rescue operation began Saturday after a devastating earthquake killed more than 4,000 people and left thousands more injured and homeless in a remote northern Afghanistan province, officials said.

Officials from the Red Cross, international humanitarian groups and the United Nations scrambled to get teams to the area to assess the scale of the disaster and organise emergency relief operations.

A report by the Pakistan-based Afghan Islamic Press (AIP) said Saturday that some 4,400 bodies had been recovered in various districts of Takhar province, which border Tajikistan.

"The area has had a lot of snow and is difficult to reach so we cannot confirm the number of people killed, but we hope more details will emerge later in the day," said Juan Martinez, a spokesman for the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

Local officials in Takhar were quoted by AIP as saying that 1,400 bodies were dug out in Guzar Darra and 1,200 in Rostak districts. More bodies were recovered from several other districts, including 800 in Baghshar, 700 in Targhar and 300 in the Khwajakhairat area, the agency said.

The AIP report could not be independently confirmed.

Monitors in northwest Pakistan have said the earthquake struck the northern Afghan border region Wednesday and was recorded at 5.6 on the Richter scale with its epicentre located on the frontier.

Mr. Martinez said a team from the aid group Medecins Sans Frontières (MSF) were hoping to reach the earthquake scene by midday Saturday from their office in the Takhar provincial capital of Taloqan.

A U.N. official in Pakistan said that two U.N. teams will assess the damage and casualties in the northern Takhar province to gauge the relief needs.

One team, travelling by land from Faizabad in neighbouring Badakhshan province, was expected to reach the site Sunday, while another team was to be going to Takhar from Tajikistan.

"We hope the team from Tajikistan will be able to reach the area sometime today (Saturday)," the official said.

Humanitarian aid workers here said that reports of up to 4,000 people dead had been received, but it was so far impossible to verify the exact toll.

"We have reports from the Afghan Red Crescent that up to 3,000 have been reported killed, and other reports reaching us say the death toll could exceed 4,000," Mr. Martinez told AFP.

Aid workers were also receiving unconfirmed local reports that up to 15,000 civilians had been made homeless and thousands of others were injured, he said, adding that emergency supplies were being collected.

"We are coordinating efforts with the Federation of the Red Cross and other aid groups, and we are preparing stocks of emergency blankets, tents and water and sanitation equipment," the ICRC spokesman added.

The province is controlled by the Afghan anti-Taleban alliance, which was forced out of Kabul in September 1996 by the Taleban Islamic militia into the north of the country.

Rescue workers were sifting through the rubble in sub-zero temperatures in the affected districts in the mountainous area, an opposition alliance spokesman said.

A Taleban official here told AFP that the hardline militia, which is battling opposition forces close to the area, had ceased all military operations.

"All our military units in Kunduz have been ordered not to fire at the enemy positions for three days beginning today (Saturday) at 0600 and not to attack Takhar airport during this period," Taleban Information and Culture Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi said.

Mr. Muttaqi also revealed that the militia was offering to provide the United Nations with two billion Afghanis (around $66,500) as well as wheat and rice to be given to the affected civilians.

"We share their sadness and we feel sorry that the opposition have kept the people in a blockade that such a disaster happens in one part of the country and the world learns of it one day later," Mr. Muttaqi said.

Officials in Islamabad late Friday said Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif had offered relief supplies as the Afghan opposition appealed to the international community to rush humanitarian assistance to the quake-hit areas.



French Prefect Claude Erignac (right), seen in this file photo, was shot dead on the street in Ajaccio (Reuters photo)

Interior minister said police have clues in Corsica killing

AJJACCIO, Corsica (AFP) — French Interior Minister Jean-Pierre Chevenement flew here Saturday saying police had assembled certain "information" in the assassination of the government's top official on the Mediterranean island.

Two young gunmen opened fire from behind as Claude Erignac, 60, was going to a classical music concert in the main city of Ajaccio around 9:15 p.m. (2015 GMT), police said.

"There are a certain number of elements that we have which allow us to know more" about what happened, he said at the main police station here shortly after his arrival.

Police sources meanwhile said three persons had been questioned an hour after the Erignac shooting and were still being questioned Saturday at Ajaccio police headquarters.

They said three possible witnesses had also been questioned.

Mr. Chevenement said a more detailed statement would be issued after the arrival of Prime Minister Lionel Jospin, expected at midday.

In Paris, President Jacques Chirac expressed his "determination that everything be done to ensure the authority of the state is respected.

"The assassination of the state representative in Corsica is a barbaric act of extreme gravity and without precedent in our history," said Mr. Chirac.

And the president of the French Senate, Rene Monory, condemned the killing as "a cowardly act.

El Niño swamps California, killing 3

SAN FRANCISCO, California (AFP) — California remained hostage Friday to El Niño-spawned storms that have killed three people and temporarily driven thousands from their homes.

Storms for the past week have been gathering over the Pacific and dropping nearly 25 centimetres of rain in some areas, sending waters breaking through levees and flooding homes and farms.

Governor Pete Wilson declared a state of emergency in 22 counties and mobilised the National Guard, the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection to conduct emergency operations and provide flood relief.

Waves of up to 10 metres high slammed the shoreline and threatened seaside homes as heavy winds and rain snarled traffic and left power outages in areas of California.

The storm kicked up winds that gusted up to 112 kilometres per hour, causing delays at San Francisco International Airport through the day. Respite did not appear to be close.

"We're getting copious amounts of rain, significant winds ... lots of problems," said Dan Keirns of the National Weather Service. "I'm not sure we're going to have anything but doom and gloom in the forecast for a while."

From the dramatic cliffs of Big Sur, south of San Francisco, to Napa Valley, wine county to the north, thousands of people evacuated their homes or braced for a rough set of storms poised to hit this weekend.

The storm also sideswiped Southern California. The oceanside route through star-studded Malibu was hit by mudslides and a boulder while a major highway in Los Angeles was snarled with car accidents.

But Northern California has taken the brunt of the storms with most residents in threatened areas fleeing for high ground, though in some places residents refused to budge.

"We're staying," said Bill Freitas, a cattle rancher on Grizzly Island, on the Central Coast north of San Francisco. "We have to be here to watch the animals. They are our livelihood."

When forecasters warned another drenching storm was on the way, vintners in Northern California's wine country worked through the night Thursday to erect walls of sandbags and plastic around their properties.

Residents in the affluent Palo Alto, home to Stanford University where President Bill Clinton's daughter attends college, were bailing out floodwaters that had inundated basements and garages.

The weeklong deluge that has soaked picturesque Santa Cruz hillsides, creating mud and landslides that destroyed more than a dozen homes and killed one man.

An estimated 2,000 people were evacuated from their homes in Santa Cruz and Monterey counties when water began rising rapidly in the Pajaro River.

A 50-year-old man died while trying to bicycle through ripping currents of a creek and the body of man was also found in the surf off of Santa Cruz Municipal Wharf.

Chinese police detain dissidents for meeting fugitive exile

BEIJING (AFP) — Chinese police have detained several opponents of the Communist regime who met a dissident named Wang Bingzhang following his clandestine return from exile in the United States, sources here said.

Police have an order to arrest Mr. Wang and have been hunting for him since he sneaked into China via the Portuguese enclave of Macau just before the Lunar New Year festival on Jan. 28, the human rights group Information Centre of Human Rights and Democratic Movement in China said Saturday.

It said Mr. Wang in 1982 organised the first overseas dissident organisation called "Alliance for Democratic China" and published a magazine called "China Spring."

Mr. Wang is in hiding and police have no trace of him, said veteran dissident Xu Shuiliang, based in the eastern city of Nanjing.

The rights group said Wang reentered China under an assumed name, and contacted "several dissidents in the Shanghai region and in the (neighbouring east Chinese) provinces of Jiangsu and Zhejiang."

Xu Shuiliang, who received Mr. Wang at his home, was visited by several policemen Wednesday night and questioned about the mystery visitor, who was previously identified only as "Qixin."

Police reportedly ransacked Mr. Xu's apartment, which is under surveillance by plain-clothes policemen.

Shanghai-based dissident Zhang Rujun, who was also contacted by the former exile, was held Wednesday afternoon and is yet to be released, the Hong Kong-based Information Centre said.

Another dissident, Zhang Yuxiang, who lives in Siyang district in Jiangsu, was interrogated Thursday, his wife told AFP. He had previously worked for the Chinese army's propaganda department but had been jailed for two years in the early 1990s.

Zhang Rujun was in 1992 sentenced to two years' deprivation of civil rights.

Xu Shuiliang, together with the now-exiled prominent dissident Wei Jingsheng, was one of the top leaders of the Democracy Wall movement of 1978-79. Mr. Xu has served several prison terms since 1975.

Rebels kill 9 Colombian police in bomb attack

BOGOTA (AFP) — Nine policemen were killed Friday when their patrol car was hit in a bomb attack in northeast Colombia that authorities blamed on leftist rebels.

Eight of the policemen died on the spot when their vehicle was ambushed by the blast, apparently triggered by remote control, just outside the Norte de Santander town of Sardinata, army Colonel Alfredo Salgado said.

The ninth, who had been escorting the patrol on a motorcycle, died in a hospital about two kilometres away from injuries he sustained in a shootout with the rebels.

Col. Salgado said the one member of the patrol who survived the attack was in the same hospital. The leftist-ultranationalist National Liberation Army operates in the area, as does a splinter group of the Popular Liberation Army.

Belgium denies secret report on military plane crash in Netherlands

BRUSSELS (AFP) — Defence Minister Jean-Pol Poncelet denied Friday that the Belgian air force had a secret report on the crash of one of its aircraft in the Netherlands in July last year which killed 34 people.

The Belgian Hercules C-130 transport, carrying four Belgian crew and 37 Dutch military band members on a return trip from Italy, crashed on landing at Eindhoven in the southern Netherlands and caught fire.

Belgian and Dutch media Thursday said the preliminary results of a confidential inquiry by the Belgian military had revealed the two pilots were not qualified to fly a C-130.

The Dutch Defence Ministry promptly said it had asked Brussels for an explanation, saying it would like to know exactly what the investigation was focusing on.

But Mr. Poncelet said the document referred to by the press was the definitive report by a joint Belgian and Dutch commission of inquiry, which concluded that the crew of the Hercules was fully qualified.

The joint inquiry said the crash was partly due to a flock of starlings which the pilot could not avoid. After touching down he had immediately reopened the throttles, causing the aircraft to leave the runway.

First batch of chickens arrives in H. Kong

HONG KONG (AFP) — The first batch of live chickens arrived in Hong Kong Saturday as authorities lifted the import ban following the deadly bird flu here.

The first consignment of some 38,000 live chickens arrived from mainland China at Hong Kong's largest wholesale market in Cheung Sha Wan district in Kowloon after a five-day quarantine and blood tests.

The chickens, kept in sealed orange plastic cages, were put in quarantine again at the wholesale market, which was sealed off to outsiders, until random blood tests showed they were free of the deadly H5N1 influenza strain.

The bird flu killed six people out of 18 confirmed cases. Agriculture and Fisheries Department (AFD) officers said the tests would be 99 per cent accurate, adding that if there were positive sign of the virus in the chickens they would be immediately exterminated.

The chickens would be released to wholesalers only after the results were known and then distributed to retail markets.

AFD officers, wearing masks, gloves and boots as required in newly introduced measures in handling poultry, were seen transferring the chickens for blood tests upon their arrival at the border in Man Kam To district.



A worker at Hong Kong's biggest Cheung Sha Wan chicken wholesale market distributes the first batch of live chickens arrived from mainland China (Reuters photo)

Chinese quarantine officials have claimed that the first batch of live chickens from six chicken farms in Guangzhou and Shenzhen were virus-free.

Normal resumption of chicken exports to Hong Kong is expected in two months, Tan Guoying, Chinese quarantine official in Guangzhou, told reporters.

Mr. Tan said exports of other poultry such as ducks and geese would also follow "soon."

Police, meanwhile, were out in force at the territory's largest poultry wholesaler market to ensure the operation went smoothly.

AFD officials have repeated warnings that smuggling in chickens would face seizure and culling with fines of 5,000 Hong Kong dollars ($650) to offenders.

The chickens were expected to be available for sale Sunday.

AFD officials earlier had made final inspections of the wholesale poultry market, which have been cleaned and disinfected under the scrutiny of government veterinarians since the ban on importing chickens from the mainland was imposed on Dec. 23.

Asked by reporters if the wholesale market met the government-required hygiene standard, AFD director Lesslie Wei replied: "You can see it yourself."

Mr. Wei, who earlier visited poultry suppliers across the Chinese border Friday, assured Hong Kong consumers that mainland chickens were "absolutely safe" and Hong Kong people could be "entirely at ease."

However, most of the territory's 200 poultry farms and "poultry hotels" used to keep imported chickens before they are sold, had failed to pass hygiene tests, according to the AFD officials.

"They will have to pass the test before a licence can be given for them to keep chickens," one official said.

In addition to the ban, nearly 1.5 million chickens were slaughtered in Hong Kong in late December in a bid to wipe out the bird flu. Since then no new cases of the flu in humans have been reported.

With the import ban, chicken suppliers in Guangdong, which neighbours Hong Kong, lost about 100 million yuan ($12 million) in sales.

The virus was suspected in Hong Kong to have come from the mainland, although this was denied by China and not supported by World Health Organisation (WHO) tests.

The deadly flu was previously found only in birds, and it is still not clear how the virus was transmitted to humans.

WHO last week recommended six months of intensive surveillance for the flu in China and Hong Kong.

But WHO official Daniel Lavanchy, in Geneva, told Hong Kong media that "the chicken flu threat will never be over. It can reappear somewhere, some day."

Australian girl rescued from crocodile death roll

BRISBANE, Australia (AFP) — A teenage girl was recovering in hospital here Saturday after being rescued from almost certain death in the jaws of a crocodile that dragged her underwater, police said here.

Elizabeth Pausa, 15, had been dangling her feet in a creek near an Aboriginal camp on the outskirts of the northeastern city of Cairns when the 3.2 metre saltwater crocodile struck late Friday.

It emerged suddenly from the water, grabbed her, then dragged her three metres downstream in an underwater death roll.

Despite being gripped by both legs in the crocodile's jaws and submerged, the teenager managed to resurface and grasp an overhanging branch as the crocodile came up for air, Police Sergeant Peter Cochrane said.

Her grandmother, Maria Matlop, who had witnessed the entire scene, jumped into the water, caught hold of the girl and wrestled her free from the crocodile's jaws.

The girl suffered a broken right ankle and deep lacerations to both legs below the knees, but was recovering in Cairns Base Hospital where she was in a stable condition Saturday.

"She was obviously very lucky," Serg. Cochrane told AFP. "The crocs normally drag their human victims down into the water and drown them. If the victims are small animals they just swallow them whole.

"The girl had been swimming in the creek with some friends and when she came out she sat on the embankment dangling her feet in the water when the croc grabbed her and pulled her in."

The Department of Environment said its officers had caught a 3.2 metre salt-water crocodile which it believed was responsible for the attack at Chinaman's Creek, a salt-water ocean tributary near the Hartley Street Aboriginal camp.

A department spokesman told ABC radio the animal had been taken to a crocodile farm near Cairns.



Former Philippine first lady Imelda Marcos, facing up to a 12-year imprisonment, is mobbed by hundreds of supporters during a rally in Manila. Mrs. Marcos proclaimed that she will run again for president in the May 11 presidential election (Reuters photo)

Imelda Marcos to run for president of the Philippines

MANILA (AFP) — Imelda Marcos, who has been convicted on graft and faces 12 years in jail, said Saturday she will run for president of the Philippines in the May 11 elections to "bring back dignity, decency and leadership" to the office.

The widow of former dictator Ferdinand Marcos said she owed it to "God country and people" to seek the nation's highest office. She also wants to ensure that her husband's wealth, estimated at billions of dollars, is given to the Philippine people.

"Sunday, Feb. 8, I am filing my certificate of candidacy for president," Mrs. Marcos, who turns 69 in July, said in a statement.

She said this was to "ensure that Marcos wealth through the Marcos Foundation will go directly to the Filipino people, and to bring back dignity, decency and leadership to the position."

"I owe this to God, country and people," said the former first lady, who polled more than a million votes to place fifth in a field of seven in the 1992 presidential elections won by Fidel Ramos.

She was elected to Congress in 1995. The widow, who lives in a high-rise condominium unit in Manila's affluent Makati financial district, has declared herself as the poorest member of the House of Representatives.

Her press office said Mrs. Marcos will first attend Sunday mass at a downtown Manila cathedral and walk of the office of the government's Commission on Elections to register her candidacy.

She is expected to run under the nearly extinct New Society Movement party of her late husband, who was deposed in a popular uprising in 1986 after 20 years in power. He died in exile in Hawaii in 1989.

Mrs. Marcos' announcement came 10 days after the Supreme Court upheld her conviction by a lower court in 1993 for graft and sentenced her to of between nine to twelve years in jail.

Her lawyers are currently fighting to keep her out of prison, pending a final ruling by the Supreme Court.

"They have robbed me of wealth and possessions. They have robbed me of justice and freedom," she said in the statement. "But they cannot rob me of dignity and sacred honour."

She is expected to speak before a rally organised by supporters at a Manila park later Saturday.

Her office at the House of Representatives also sent to news agencies a copy of a will handwritten by Ferdinand Marcos, dated April 9, 1973, a year after he placed the Philippines under martial law.

"My worldly goods have been placed in the custody and for the disposition of the Marcos Foundation dedicated to the welfare of the Filipino people," said the will, bearing Ferdinand Marcos' familiar signature.

Last month, the Swiss Supreme Court ordered Swiss banks to return to the Philippines more than $500 million the Marcoses stashed away abroad.

The money is to be deposited in an escrow account in Manila until rival claims to it by the Philippine government, the Marcos family and 10,000 torture victims during the Marcos rule are settled.

Imelda has claimed that 90 per cent of the money belongs to her.

Observers here say there was little chance of Imelda Marcos winning the presidency and making a political comeback.

Her son, Ferdinand Marcos Junior, who lost in his bid for the Senate in 1995, is seeking a seat in the House of Representatives in his father's northern home province of Ilocos Norte in May.

A daughter, Imee, is running for governor of the province.

There are about six serious contenders for the presidency, including survey front-runner and former movie actor Joseph Estrada and House Speaker Jose de Venecia, President Fidel Ramos' preferred successor who has the backing of the ruling party.

British, Filipino forensic experts begin to identify bodies from crash

CAGAYAN DE ORO, Philippines (AFP) — British and Filipino forensic experts Saturday began sifting through human remains brought down from a rugged mountain peak where 104 people were killed when a jetliner crashed five days ago.

At least 13 body bags were flown from Mount Sumagaya Friday and Saturday by helicopters which managed to land on a clearing hacked out near the forested summit after thick clouds briefly gave way, officials said.

The bags were flown to a hangar near the airport in this southern city, transformed into a makeshift morgue.

All 99 passengers and five crew aboard Cebu Pacific Air flight 387 were killed when the DC-9 jetliner slammed into Mount Sumagaya near its summit Monday. The plane was bound for Cagayan de Oro from Manila.

Twelve fingerprint and DNA experts from the British group Global Partners Ltd. joined National Bureau of Investigation officials in the grisly and painstaking task of identifying the victims.

Once identified, the remains will be brought to a funeral parlour, where relatives can keep vigil, said Jesus Dureza, a senior aide of President Fidel Ramos in charge of operations.

Restive relatives were barred from viewing the remains at the hangar but were kept informed of developments at a hotel where Cebu Pacific officials had them billeted. Authorities also sought dental and other records to help in the identification.

"We join them in this concern (to see the remains) but we will also have to ... see to it that when we say that a particular body is Juan de la Cruz, it has to be 100 per cent sure that he is Juan de la Cruz," Mr. Dureza said.

"I think they will understand that maybe this will have to be a long and tedious process," he added.

Philip Lewis, head of the British team, said: "It is virtually impossible to give a time frame for the process."

"I was informed that the biggest part of the bodies recovered is the half body of a woman," said Antonio Calingin, mayor of Claveria town which covers the crash site.

Asked if he still hoped that there could be some survivors, Elmer Calonsag, a cousin of passenger Artney Cabilas, said: "Not any more. Little by little, hope has faded. We just want the pieces retrieved."

Health Secretary Carmencita Reodica said psychiatrists and counsellors from Manila and two other cities were on hand to help the relatives deal with the "extreme emotional trauma."

Civilian searchers who came down the mountain have recounted seeing identifiable human body parts hanging from branches, and scattered on the ground.

The volunteers also saw a wheel from the DC-9 atop a tree and what appeared to be the shattered cockpit canopy of the passenger jet.

Meanwhile, several rescue volunteers trekked down the mountain Friday because of a lack of food supplies and drinking water amid appeals for donations and help for exhausted searchers.

Mr. Calingin said he had earlier planned to have the food supplies brought up the mountain by foot Thursday, but was told by the military that they would be airlifted.

The food was not delivered after helicopters failed to penetrate through thick clouds on the mountain.

"We ran out of food," said Noel Esin, a rescue volunteer who went down the mountain Friday evening with 16 colleagues.

He said volunteers quickly ran out of food when they had to share it with natives in the area who climbed the mountain to help in the search.

"There were so many volunteers who did not belong to any team at all. They shared our food," he said.

Jobless ex-soldiers behind cash heists in South Africa

JOHANNESBURG (AFP) — A mini-army comprising jobless former soldiers and ex-guerrillas from across southern Africa is behind a spate of recent cash-in-transit heists in South Africa, the Saturday Star newspaper said.

The report, quoting police and security sources, said money from the heists — running into millions of rands (dollars) — is being used to buy property in neighbouring countries.

It said the criminal detachment, which operates on strict military lines, is made up of former South African, Botswanan and Mozambican soldiers, as well as former South African and Zimbabwean guerrillas.

Most of its weaponry and ammunition is imported from Mozambique, the report added.

A senior official of a private security company, Charlie Landman, told the newspaper that many members of the apartheid military — particularly those who were once at the forefront of the fight against anti-apartheid guerrillas — are now jobless.

"They had been made promises by the authorities that were not kept," said Mr. Landman, who once headed the South African police murder and robbery unit in Johannesburg. "They feel badly done by."

In addition, he said, thousands of members of MK, the now-disbanded military wing of the ruling African National Congress, had not been absorbed into the new South African National Defence Force. "Where do you think they are now?" he said.

Police have said the cash heists are conducted with military-style precision, with gangs of up to 15 robbers dragging a spiked chain across a road to halt the armoured van, opening fire on the security guards, taking the cash boxes, and fleeing in waiting getaway vehicles.

In December, 18 million rand ($3.7 million) was snatched in one heist, while other holdups have netted the robbers sums of up to 10 million rand ($2.1 million).

In all, around 100 million rand ($20.4 million) has been stolen in the past year and only about one million rand ($200,000) of this recovered.

European balloonists safe, but disappointed

LETPAGAN, Myanmar (AFP) — The Breitling Orbiter 2 balloon landed safely Saturday in this dusty township in northern Myanmar after breaking a world longest flight record and covering 8,000 kilometres.

Thousands of locals and military personnel flocked to Letpagan township to greet the European team.

The balloon with its bright orange gondola dangling beneath touched down safely at 9:26 a.m. local time (0256 GMT), about 150 kilometres north of Yangon.

"We are disappointed not to have been able to succeed in our attempt (to circumnavigate the globe) but we are pleased to have broken the flight length record," a member of the crew said after emerging from the gondola cabin.

Once it touched down, soldiers had to fire their M-16 automatic rifles into the huge silver balloon to deflate it.

The balloonists, who broke the world record for the longest non-stop unrifled flight, earlier this week gave up hopes of circling the globe after Beijing refused them permission to cross Chinese airspace.

The trio broke the world record at 1109 GMT Friday, staying aloft for longer than nine days, three minutes and 44 seconds, their press centre in Geneva said earlier. They covered about 8,000 kilometres since taking off, and flew over France, Italy, Greece, Turkey, Syria, Iraq, Pakistan and India.

The balloon arrived above Myanmar much earlier than anticipated Friday night. Organisers here and the Yangon authorities were not expecting it until late Saturday because of light winds over the Bay of Bengal earlier. Bertrand Piccard from Switzerland, along with Belgian Wim Verstraeten and British flight engineer Andy Elson, left the Swiss Alps on Jan. 28 in what was the fifth such attempt to fly around the world in a balloon since last December.

The earlier record, set in 1986 by U.S. airman Dick Rutan and his aircraft "Voyager", tumbled as the Orbiter floated over the Bay of Bengal about 320 kilometres northwest of here, while the crew tried desperately to coax their craft towards Yangon.

Myanmar Thursday granted a relatively rare approval for the celebrated balloon to land or fly over this southeast Asian country.

It is only the second time that foreign would-be record breakers have been allowed to touch down in Myanmar, which has for decades been sealed from the outside world.

The last was in 1997 when a woman pilot circled the globe in a helicopter.

Sources in Yangon said there had been no publicity about the balloon in the local press, but that the Myanmar authorities had issued visas for about 10 members of the international press who flew in from Geneva Friday night.

Yangon officials said the press corps were being ferried to the landing zone by helicopter.

A five-man team of organisers for the round-the-world attempt earlier flew into Yangon from Switzerland by chartered jet to recover the balloon crew and gondola. A news conference was due to be held later Saturday in Yangon.

The crew will then be whisked back to Geneva for a press conference Sunday while the gondola heads back to Britain where it was built.

The distinctive silver balloon will however remain in Myanmar.

"There is no point in taking all that fabric back, we will probably give it to Myanmar farmers who may find it useful," the Breitling Flight Director Alan Noble told AFP Friday.

No official celebrations for the balloonists were planned as their bid to fly over the world has not been "a total success", a Myanmar official said.

SONY

EXPERIENCE RECORDABLE DIGITAL SOUND.



MiniDisc lets you record your own music compilations in digital sound.

VISIT THE NEW SONY DISPLAY CENTRE.

If you want to see exactly what Sony has to offer, visit the brand new dedicated Sony Display Centre at Hamzeh Centre. There's a wide range of products on display, featuring the most recent developments in audio visual and information technology. Try the products out for yourself or ask one of our professional staff to give you a detailed demonstration. It's up to you. The Sony Display Centre is open Sat - Wed 9.30am - 5.00pm and Thurs 9.30am - 12 noon. See you there!

Sony Display Centre, Hamzeh Centre, Opposite Marriott Hotel, Amman. Tel: 607051/53/54

Jordan Times

An independent Arab political daily published in English by the Jordan Press Foundation Established 1975

جوردن تايمز يومية عربية سياسية مستقلة تصدر بالانجليزية عن المؤسسة الصحفية الاردنية

Chairman of the Board of Directors:
MAHMOUD AL KAYED

Director General:
MOHAMMAD AMAD

Editor-in-Chief:
GEORGE S. HAWATMEH

Editorial and advertising offices:
Jordan Press Foundation,
University Road, P.O. Box 6710, Amman, Jordan.
Telephones: 5684311, 5699634, 5667171, 5603585
Facsimile: 5696183
E-mail: jotimes@go.com.jo
Web Sites: http://accessme.com/JordanTimes/

The Jordan Times is published daily except Fridays. Subscription and advertising rates are available from the Jordan Times advertising department.

Music isn't policy

AS IT turns out, not all of the 24 deputies who want to impeach the minister of information want to do so to protest his involvement in the Arab Song Festival that was held here during the 'Eid Al Fitr holiday. The deputies, we are told, want the minister, Dr. Samir Mutawi, to be sacked because of the manner in which he has steered the country's information policy over the past year. They want him removed because of the way he handled the Misha'al affair, his contempt, as they put it, for the High Court of Justice's ruling on the unconstitutionality of the temporary press and publications law and finally for his approval and Jordan Television's live transmission of the Orbit music festival that apparently offended the sensitivities of those deputies.

If the parliamentarians succeed in casting a vote of no-confidence in Dr. Mutawi, the move would equal a vote of no-confidence in the whole government simply because they oppose the official information policy as a whole. If this is indeed the case, the deputies should be fair in their handling of the new campaign. In the Misha'al affair, the minister was kept in the dark over the fiasco, and, in the words of His Majesty the King, he was only "saying what he was told to say." As for the reaction to the high court's ruling of Jan. 26, Dr. Mutawi can hardly be blamed. He only echoed a confused and divided cabinet which was caught unawares by the court's verdict. Deputies know, or should know, very well that the Ministry of Information was not alone in deciding whether the Orbit festival should be held in Jordan. Such an important event would have required authorisation by many other ministries and departments in the Kingdom.

The 24 deputies, in practising democracy must not overlook all other considerations in going after the impeachment of the minister. And we assume that they will not. If they are after the government of Dr. Abdul Salam Majali then, fair enough, they should say so and act on it in the right way. While we agree with the 24 deputies that little is desired or appreciated in the government's information policy we do not agree with their description of the way Jordanians, young and old, embraced the song festival. They certainly are not devoid of morality and decency. They only got the opportunity to have fun and grabbed it. The two issues are separate in our eyes. Our honourable deputies should not confuse them or themselves in their own handling of the affair.

ARABIC PRESS COMMENTARIES

Al Ra'i's Fahed Fanek Saturday said that it is not enough for the Arabs to say that they prefer a diplomatic solution to the U.S.-Iraq crisis, nor is it enough for them to say that they sympathise with the Iraqi people who have been suffering from the sanctions for seven years. He said it is not enough for the Arab League to make limited moves or pressure Baghdad into accepting American subjugation and the humiliation of the Iraqi nation. What is needed he said is for the Arab League to offer a solution that would end the standoff and at the same time safeguard Iraq's interests and prevent a military strike. The writer said that for the past seven years, the Iraqis allowed the inspectors to comb Iraqi territory destroying all kinds of weapons of mass destruction but still the U.S. claims that Iraq possesses such weapons and is finding in this claim an excuse to launch a strike on Iraq, noted the writer. He said the Arabs should be loud and clear in supporting their Iraqi brothers and should not tell the U.S. secretary of state something behind closed-doors, which they openly contradict later on. He said the Arabs should adopt a practical position to defuse the tension on the one hand and help ward off any military strike against the Iraqi nation on the other.

Al Dustour's Nazih Qousus accused the government of bribing Parliament members to secure their backing for its policies by offering them salary raises and duty free cars. Qousus said that in 1993 the former government of Abdul Salam Majali raised the salaries of the deputies and the Cabinet ministers by 50 per cent and allowed them to purchase duty free cars, and now the second government of Prime Minister Majali is repeating the same pattern favouring the deputies and the ministers of all civil servants and enabling them to enjoy privileges while denying the majority of government employees any salary increases to improve their living conditions. The writer said that in addition the government has allowed deputies who receive pensions for their former service in government offices to continue to do so plus giving them a salary for being Parliament members, thus they receive two salaries from the state's treasury. He said this behaviour shows that the government is very rich and generous only to the deputies and ministers while claiming that the present financial situation does not allow it to consider increasing the salaries of the rest of the government employees.

Sunday's Economic Pulse

By Dr. Fahed Fanek

A strike against Iraq will hurt Jordan

LAST WEEK, U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright was working day and night, putting in overtime to set the stage in Europe and the Middle East and pave the way for an American strike, or for waging yet another devastating war against Iraq, a small developing country, which has been under siege for seven-and-a-half years.

Iraq is officially disarmed. It was stripped of all weapons of mass destruction, and the means to make them, yet America will use all kinds of weapons of mass destruction against the Iraqi people, a behaviour which, for a superpower, is unethical to say the least.

Until last week, when His Majesty the King issued his letter to HRH Crown Prince Hassan and the nation, political life in Jordan was business as usual, as if we were not concerned except for following up on the news out of sheer curiosity and commenting on developments. This can be carried out conveniently while we are relaxing in Amman or elsewhere, or while enjoying the Arab Song Festival organised by Orbit in Amman, and we can demonstrate our fierce love of an artist by shooting him in the foot.

Last week the government made some contacts but it stopped short of sending an envoy to Baghdad as Russia, France and Turkey did. Jordan is no more a political ally to Iraq today than it was during the First American-Arab War (1991). Yet a strike against Iraq, camouflaged by the U.S. as a strike against Saddam Hussein, will hurt Jordan in a big way, which makes it incumbent upon the Jordanian government to take a stronger position and play a more active role in order to avoid the disaster.

During the big crisis of 1990, the Jordanian government championed an Arab solution to avoid war, which was preempted by certain forces to pave the way for an American military solution, with an Arab and international cover. Well, if an Arab solution can work and was worth advocating when Kuwait was overrun by Iraq, why should such an Arab solution not be considered and given a chance to face the minor problem of Iraqi objections to too many Americans leading the international teams of weapons inspectors, or allowing the inspectors to enter certain symbolic buildings which so far have remained off limits.

One would ask why Arab countries don't provide the International Security Council with inspectors to replace or at least complement American and British inspectors. We also miss the role of the Arab League, which Egypt took upon itself to freeze to death since 1991. Hopefully the league's secretary general is not in Baghdad with an ultimatum or a message of submission or otherwise.

Deputy Prime Minister for Development Affairs and the Minister of State for Prime Ministry Affairs Jawad Anani responded to a question by Reuters about damages that Jordan may suffer in case of renewed war against Iraq. Reuters deserves credit for raising the issue. We wonder whether other top Jordanian officials took note.

If the U.S. would start a war against Iraq, Jordan's oil supplies will be suspended indefinitely. Replacing Iraqi oil from Saudi Arabia or the world oil market will cost some $600 million a year at current low prices. Jordan's exports to Iraq amount to some $300 million a year under the protocol and $200 million under the oil-for-food arrangement will be lost. The tourism sector will all but close down resulting in a loss of around $750 million. Jordan will receive an influx of Iraqis, Jordanians, Palestinians and others, which will create economic and administrative troubles beyond the ability of Jordan to cope.

The direct damages to the Jordanian economy would be in the order of $1.5 billion or 20 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP). Indirect damages will be much higher as industrial companies go out of business, reserves of foreign exchange are depleted, private capital is expatriated, unemployment rises and poverty becomes more widespread and with all the political consequences and destabilising effects attached.

If Jordan has so much at stake, the government should not keep watching the count-down for the war. What about the role of Jordan in Arab and regional politics which we like to describe as central and vital?

The government of Jordan is required to rise to the challenges of the day and try to prevent the disaster, if not motivated by Arab and national considerations, then at the Jordanian peoples' self-interest.

American bishops appeal for lifting of sanctions on Iraq

AMMAN (J.T.) — According to the Vienna-based International Progress Organisation (IPO), more than 50 Catholic bishops from all over the United States have launched an urgent appeal to U.S. President Bill Clinton for the immediate lifting of the Security Council sanctions against Iraq. The bishops state that the sanctions are a violation of moral teaching, specifically as articulated within the Catholic tradition, an IPO statement made available to the Jordan Times said. Following is the text of the appeal, according to the IPO, which was released at a press briefing at the National Press Club in Washington DC last week:

We, Bishop Members of Pax Christi-USA and other bishops, are writing to you to express our profound moral concerns about the U.S.-led sanctions against the people of Iraq. In conscience, we urge you to call for the immediate lifting of the sanctions by the U.N. Security Council, to end all U.S. support for these sanctions, and to refrain from any military action in the current dispute.

In 1993, on the 10th anniversary of our pastoral letter, "The Challenge of Peace," we U.S. Catholic Bishops issued "The Harvest of Justice is Sown in Peace." In this document, we acknowledged that "in the aftermath of the cold war, economic sanctions have become a more common form of international pressure...as a means of combating aggression short of military intervention...In each case [in which they have been applied] we have consulted closely with the church in the country affected and have been guided by its judgement."

In our document, we have enunciated four criteria for the assessment of the morality of the use of sanctions:

1. Concerns about the limited effectiveness of sanctions and the harms caused to civilian populations require that comprehensive sanctions be considered only in response to aggression or grave and ongoing injustice after less coercive measures have been tried and with clear and reasonable conditions set for their removal.

The harm caused by sanctions should be proportionate to the good likely to be achieved; sanctions should avoid grave and irreversible harm to the civilian population. Therefore, sanctions should be targeted as much as possible against those directly responsible for the injustice, distinguishing between the government and the people...Embargoes, when employed, must make provisions for the fundamental human needs of the civilian population. The denial of basic needs may not be used as a weapon.

The consent to sanctions by substantial portions of the affected population is morally relevant...

2. Sanctions should always be part of a broader process of diplomacy aimed at finding an effective solution to the injustice.

We find that after seven years, the sanctions against Iraq violate these criteria.

Sanctions have taken the lives of well over one million persons, 60 per cent of whom are children under five years of age. The 1991 bombing campaign destroyed electric, water and sewage plants, as well as agricultural, food and medical production facilities. All of these structures continue to be inoperative, or function at sub-minimal levels, because the sanctions have made it impossible to buy spare parts for their repair.

This bombing campaign, together with the total embargo in place since August 1990 was, and is, an attack against the civilian population of Iraq. Such counter-population warfare has been unequivocally condemned by the most authoritative teaching body of the Catholic Church, The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965).

Independent agencies continue to document the devastating impact sanctions are having on the civilian population. These include the United Nation's own World Health Organisation (WHO) and the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO). In 1996, UNICEF reported that 4,500 children were dying monthly.

Leaders of the church in Iraq tell us that sanctions must end. For example, Archbishop Gabriel Kassab, of the southern region of Iraq, stated: "Epidemics rage, taking away infants and the sick by the thousands. Those children who survive disease succumb to malnutrition, which stunts their physical and mental development. Our situation is unbearable!...We appeal to people of conscience to work to end the blockade of Iraq...Let it be known that Resolution 986 (the so-called 'oil-for-food' resolution) has served to divert world attention from the tragedy, while in some respects aggravating it."

In fact, only 53 per cent of money received for the sale of oil is available to Iraq. Thirty per cent of the money realised from the oil revenues is paid to Kuwait, and a sizeable amount covers various costs of the U.N. expenses in Iraq. The food and medicine for Iraqi children, and the rest of the civilian population, from Resolution 986, are constantly delayed, largely because of the extraordinary complexity of the procedures for the implementation of the resolution.

Mr. President, whatever the intent of these sanctions, we are compelled by this assessment to judge them to be a violation of moral teaching, specifically as articulated within the Catholic tradition. In fact, the sanctions are not only in violation of the teaching of the Catholic Church, but they violate the human rights of Iraqi people, because they deprive innocent people from food and medicine, basic elements for normal life. We call for the immediate cessation of sanctions against Iraq.

We sincerely hope you will give careful consideration to the moral issues we have raised. We are willing to work with you in trying to find a truly just path to peace in the Middle East.

LETTERS

Personal grudges are unbecoming of superpowers

To the editor:

MATTERS OF politics, just like business, should never be based on or influenced by personal reasons, for that would make for unwise and utterly stupid politics. But that, no matter how you look at it, seems to be the case in the ongoing and politically-immature tug-of-war between the U.S. and Iraq. For starters, the people of both countries have little to do with, or care about, what is taking place in this dangerous game of "who is more stubborn" or "who will blink first."

When people's lives are at stake, somehow it seems to me that playing "chicken" is not only sheer stupidity, but shows a total disregard for the sanctity and value of human lives, for innocent civilians ultimately, as usual, pay the bloody price with their lives. No matter how widespread the devastation the U.S. might inflict on Iraq is, barring the use of nuclear weapons, it's a safe bet that Saddam Hussein will come out of it unscathed, if not stronger. If the U.S. thinks otherwise, then it has a long way to go in understanding how politics works in the Middle East. The logical question has to be: what is the point of all of this? The Iraqi regime has proven over and over that it is capable of the grossest miscalculations and does not seem to learn much from past mistakes, regardless of the horrifying price of such mistakes. Thus, we can safely give up on the Iraqi regime to make the right and wise decisions.

But what is the U.S.' rationale and justification for acting irrationally? To teach Saddam Hussein a lesson? To force him to comply with the Security Council's resolutions? Striking Iraq again will simply not achieve these aims, and the result will be more suffering of people who have suffered so much already and have lost just about everything, except for their immovable leadership. Moreover, there is no international consensus on attacking Iraq, unless you can call Britain and Israel the international community.

With the peace process at a stalemate, and the United States being the only country that has a remote chance of moving things forward, the last thing the United States need is to lose more credibility among the peoples of the region and create more resentment towards the seemingly double-standards it applies when it comes to compliance with the Security Council's resolutions. To perpetuate the idea, that Iraq still poses a grave danger to its neighbours or the world, after it was stripped of any significant military capability, has been milked to death and borders on the ludicrous. At this point in time, saber-rattling and the use of brute force should be left as a last option after all else is exhausted, and only when there is real justification for it. My heart goes out to the Iraqi people, who continue to be the real victims of this whole mess. May God be with them.

Walid M. Maaytah
Amman

Diplomacy tops confrontation

To the editor:

THE MILITARY strike, the U.S. looming option that might take place soon, is not only an aggression on Iraq and a violation of its sovereignty in the name of international legitimacy, but also a dire threat which bodes ill for a renewed cycle of tension, violence and dangers to the neighbouring countries and the entire region at large. Perhaps Jordan is the sole country which is going to suffer severely if all diplomatic efforts to contain the crisis prove a failure. This means the exodus of Iraqi refugees fleeing to Jordan and thus more pressures on its already limited resources, more burdens for Jordanian citizens, and more seriously more decline and deterioration of the economy. We don't harbour evil thoughts if we say that Israel is behind the escalation of tension and polluting the whole atmosphere with fear and uncertainty, serving no party but itself in the region in a bid to divert attention from the peace process and wreck hopes aimed at reviving it.

The latest statements of His Royal Highness Crown Prince Hassan to MBC Television reflect Jordan's keen interest to solve the crisis through diplomatic channels, while asserting that Jordan will not allow use of its airspace against Iraq. Again His Royal Highness' assurances are directed against all doubts that spoke about Jordan bowing to American pressures.

Mazen Altamimi
Amman

Tantamount to a holocaust

To the editor:

IN HIS article "Visiting the Holocaust Museum, and beyond" (Jordan Times, Jan. 27, 1998) *Mr. Rami Khouri* says that: "The Jews and other Zionists say that the deliberate mass extermination of a people, on the one-hand, and the taking of land and creation of a refugee problem, on the other, are issues of different magnitude."

It should be pointed out that the Palestinians consider that their deprivation of the whole of Palestine by expelling them by deliberate sheer brutal force (Plan Dalet) and even massacres committed against them during 1948 and after, is tantamount to a holocaust. It is not a question of merely taking land and the creation of a refugee problem. It is a question of a whole nation being literally uprooted from its ancestral homeland followed by the wanton destruction of thousands of their homes and villages. Suffice it to mention here as typical examples: the bulldozing of Magharibah quarter in Jerusalem and the wiping out of the whole villages of Beit Nuba, Imwas (Emmaus) and Yalo near Latrun salient, north of Jerusalem in 1967.

This whole matter reminds me of a debate which took place years ago between the well-known British historian Arnold Toynbee and the Israeli ambassador in Ottawa, Canada. The ambassador questioned the historian: How can you compare the massacre of millions of Jews by Nazi Germany with the massacre of Deir Yassin inhabitants. The historian replied: there is a difference in quantity but not in quality.

Pascal B. Karmy
Amman

Singing freedom

To the editor:

MEMBERS OF Parliament who opposed the hosting of the Arabic Song Festival recently in Amman and demanded that Minister of Information Affairs Samir Mutawi resign have regrettably lost focus of the very purpose of the festival. They have missed two points: The health of the Jordanian economy, and the freedom of individual preference.

Jordan's foremost earner of hard currency is tourism — at $750 million making up over 12 per cent of GDP in 1997 — some of which comes (or at least should come) from such festivals. On this sector depend the jobs of people who are probably relatives of some of those deputies. Ironically, the 4000 or so extra hotel rooms being built across the country need to be filled, and at the current trend of boring tourism in Jordan, there is no chance they will be filled, and the dramatic effect if those projects are to fail is quite obvious even to the most novice of deputies. If Jordan were to attract high spending tourists — who tend to be looking for pleasure, fun and culture — such festivals should not only be permitted but actually encouraged. In reality the development of tourism in Jordan lacks many attractions such as beaches, casinos, restaurants, theatres, and similar attractions. Only when Jordan gets to that point can we claim to have a developed and sustainable tourist industry like that of Israel, Cyprus, or Lebanon.

Furthermore, the deputies' call to ban such activities contradicts a basic human need: enjoyment. If the festival sparked sensitivities of these deputies and other like-minded individuals, they can simply turn their televisions off. Similarly, viewers who do not like to watch religious programmes, e.g., church masses, Koranic explanations, or what have you, can simply flip to other channels. Individual taste is not something that is to be dictated by members of parliament, because that's not their job. Their job is to make this country a better place to live for the majority of people, and allowing (and promoting) the country to earn much-needed hard currency is one way to do that.

If such income-generating projects are banned in Jordan, and the sources of foreign currency start to dwindle, then the salaries of those members (recently hiked from JD950 to JD1,500; 15 times the average Jordanian's) should also be cut. If this is principally unacceptable to those members, then their demands should simply be ignored.

Ramzi Batarseh
Amman

Annan persuaded to actively seek diplomatic solution; Germany sides with U.S. against Iraq

(Continued from page 1)

against Iraq, Chancellor Kohl told a defence forum meeting in Munich.

He said the United States has "earned to get the full political back-up and support and this support is deserved."

Only Britain had until Mr. Kohl's comment said they would work with the United States on a military strike against Iraq.

In an editorial titled "the two liars," the official newspaper Al Qadissiya said that U.S. President Bill Clinton and British Prime Minister Tony Blair "are defending to the death the aggressive option to attack Iraq, despite the will of the international community which categorically rejects any recourse to force and threats."

"Clinton and his accomplice in this crime, Blair, have brought out all sorts of lies to justify their determination to launch an attack," the paper said.

Mr. Blair and President Clinton repeatedly reaffirmed the right to use military force to make Iraqi President Saddam Hussein cooperate fully with U.N. arms inspectors during their summit in Washington on Friday.

And the message was sounded again by the two leaders in Mr. Clinton's weekly radio address on Saturday.

"The United States and Britain are determined to prevent Saddam Hussein from threatening the world with weapons of mass destruction again," said Mr. Clinton.

Mr. Blair added: "We are pursuing all the diplomatic avenues open to us. But if they fail, and force is the only way to get him into line, then force must be used."

President Clinton also spoke with Australian Prime Minister John Howard on Saturday to ask for Australian participation in any military strike on Iraq.

Mr. Howard's spokesman said the Australian premier gave no immediate response, but said he would put the matter to his cabinet.

The American leader also asked for Japanese Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto's diplomatic support in the crisis, triggered by Iraq's refusal to grant inspectors from the U.N. Special Commission (UNSCOM) on disarming Iraq access to so-called presidential sites.

While Britain and the United States have been laying the ground for a military strike, fellow permanent Security Council members China, France and Russia have all firmly spoken out against the military option.

Russian and French envoys were leading diplomatic effort to defuse the crisis on Saturday.

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Viktor Posuvalyuk, who has spent a week in Baghdad trying to broker a peaceful solution, has been ordered to carry on talks in the Iraqi capital at least until Monday.

"There is some progress in the talks with the Iraqi side. But it is a very complex issue, demanding further very serious efforts not only in Baghdad but also in Washington, London and New York," a Russian official told Interfax.

French presidential envoy Bertrand Dufoureq meanwhile arrived Saturday in Saudi Arabia for talks with Saudi leaders, after presenting the Iraqi president with a French plan to end the stand-off earlier in the week.

Mr. Dufoureq is due to end his diplomatic drive, which has also taken him to Syria and Egypt, in Kuwait.

Kuwait's parliament was holding an extraordinary session behind closed doors on Saturday to hear a government report on the crisis which was expected to detail measures taken by the government to counter any Iraqi threat.

European Commission President Jacques Santer called on Saturday for a peaceful end to the crisis over U.N. weapons inspections in Iraq, saying it would be the best overall solution.

"We urge all parties to reach a peaceful solution because that will be best for Iraq, the region and the world," said Mr. Santer, currently on a tour of the Middle East.

But he added: "Iraq must respect U.N. resolutions and authorise international inspection teams to carry out their functions stipulated in those resolutions."

Mr. Santer also noted that "the EU is the biggest donor" of humanitarian aid to Iraq with more than $220 million last year, Mr. Santer said.

The president of the European Commission dismissed the apparent divisions between Paris and London over the Iraq crisis. Britain is backing a U.S. threat to carry out a military action against Iraq, while France is vehemently opposed.

"At this moment there is no other position of EU other than to comply with U.N. resolutions," Mr. Santer said.

He also expected that a military strike on Iraq would bring "further destabilisation in the region that would not enhance the investors."

Iraq has barred searches of presidential sites on grounds of sovereignty and has frozen any discussion of the issue until at least April, saying it wanted to see results of committees which are evaluating progress in the country's disarmament.

Two technical evaluation committees (TEM) evaluating Iraq's disarmament wrapped up their work on Saturday.

The two committees — comprising experts from UNSCOM and Iraq, as well as officials from the five permanent U.N. Security Council members and Germany — were looking into missile warheads and VX nerve gas.

Alan Dacey, spokesman for UNSCOM's monitoring centre in Baghdad, refused to comment on the results, saying a report would be submitted to U.N. chief weapons inspector Richard Butler.

He said a TEM meeting on biological weapons would probably be held later this month although no date or place had been set.

Iraqi presidential advisor General Amer Al Saadi told the weekly newspaper Al Mustaqbal that he hoped to have provided the TEM with enough evidence to prove Iraq does not have any VX gas.

"Iraq does not possess this deadly weapon. I hope we will succeed in providing the scientific proof to support our statements," he said.

U.N. arms inspectors must verify that Iraq no longer possesses weapons of mass destruction and long-range missiles before sanctions imposed after its 1990 invasion of Kuwait can be lifted.

Making it worse for the Iraqi government, a former head of Iraqi military intelligence said in an interview released on Saturday that Iraqi President Saddam Hussein still had enough biological weapons to wipe out the population of the entire Middle East.

Wafiq Al Samerai, who defected from Iraq in 1994, also told the German news magazine Der Spiegel that United Nations weapons inspectors would never be able to locate and destroy all of the country's chemical and biological weapons.

"At one time there were more than 200 containers with biological warfare agents in Iraq. Even if, at a guess, half of that can't be used any more, the remainder is still enough to depopulate the Middle East completely," he said.

"It's impossible to completely destroy all the chemical and biological weapons," the former intelligence chief said when asked if the U.N. inspectors had not carried out their job well since beginning their mission in 1991.

"Production plants for C and B weapons were dismantled before the U.N. inspectors arrived, moved to secret locations and reconstructed," he said in the interview, released ahead of publication in the weekly news magazine on Monday.

"All documents are so hidden that foreigners will never find them. Iraq also still has at least 45 missiles with a range of 600 kilometres. I'm convinced they could be used by Saddam as carriers of chemical and biological weapons."

He did not say how up-to-date his information was on Iraq or reveal any of his sources.

Mr. Samerai, who now lives in London according to Spiegel, said he believed a major military strike on Iraq was the only way to topple President Hussein as an attack on him alone would be very difficult.

Mr. Samerai said a military strike would create such unrest that the Iraqi army would then mount a revolt.

Govt starts procedures to nullify temporary press law

(Continued from page 1)

can prevent the government from issuing another draft, or discuss the same amendments to the 1993 press law."

The government's revisions introduced prohibitive capital requirements for press establishments — JD300,000 for weeklies and JD600,000 for dailies — increased the list of topics forbidden to be reported, and imposed tough penal and administrative sanctions for violators.

They resulted in the closure of 13 of Jordan's 20 weeklies.

Mr. Tal maintained that the government had to find ways to prevent what he described as "irresponsible reporting" that endangered national security and damaged ties with "friendly" Arab and Western states.

"Are we going to accept the return of the yellow and sensational press to our cultural, political and media life?" he asked in a column that appeared Saturday in the Arabic daily Al Ra'i.

"We believe that the answer to that is the crux of the matter," he said. "We have to engage in a dialogue on the form of the Press and Publications Law that we want and look at it as a law governing information, culture and politics, and not just a press law."

The official's statement that the prime minister is determined to enforce the High Court ruling promises to end a heated debate between journalists and publishers of weekly newspapers and the government.

Earlier yesterday, the weeklies had threatened to sue the government if it did not implement the Jan. 26 ruling, allowing them to resume publication.

"If the government does not take a positive step, we have no other option but to go back to court," Tajeddine Hroub, publisher of Hawadeth Al Sa'a weekly, told the Jordan Times before the disclosure of the government's intention to implement the ruling.

Many of the pro-opposition weeklies, outspoken critics of the 1994 Jordanian-Israeli peace treaty, had planned to hit news-stands immediately after the High Court ruled that the May 1997 amendments, introduced while Parliament was in recess, were unconstitutional.

Police last week confiscated issues of Hawadeth Al Sa'a, the first weekly that tried to return after the ruling.

The High Court said the introduction of the temporary law was unconstitutional since there was no state of emergency or necessitating circumstances for the government to change the 1993 Press and Publications Law.

The Ministry of Information maintained that the High Court's rulings were not retroactive, and therefore its decision to revoke the licences of 13 weeklies was still standing. Only by obtaining a new licence could the weeklies hit the news-stands again.

The weeklies have charged Minister of State for Information Affairs Samir Mutawi with procrastination, while their lawyers have accused the government of violating the High Court statute.

Meanwhile, Seif Sharif, head of the Jordan Press Association (JPA), said the JPA's nine-member board will meet today to chart a plan of action.

"We will discuss the government's argument thoroughly with our legal advisor and issue a statement," he said in a telephone interview.

Ahmad Khatib contributed to the above article.

Sri Lanka: A spicy paradise to live and die for

By Christine Jayasinghe
Agence France Presse



World famous spices from Sri Lanka (photo by Business Lanka)

COLOMBO — Sri Lanka which celebrated 50 years of independence from Britain last Wednesday has been visited, invaded and colonised by ancient Greek seafarers, Arab merchants, Asian encroachers and ambitious Europeans.

The British were only the last in a long line of travellers who stopped at the island, strategically placed on Indian Ocean sea routes, either making a brief stay like Marco Polo or an extended one like the Portuguese and Dutch.

Sri Lanka, called Taprobane by Greek cartographers of old, Serendib by the Arabs and Ceylon by the Europeans, lured most of them with its rich stores of spices and gems. Almost all the peoples who came intermarried with the Sinhalese and their descendants have distinctive names and ethnic identities, although it is now difficult to tell them apart by their looks alone.

The Sinhalese themselves trace their origins back to a North Indian prince, Vijaya, whose father banished him for disobedience. He and 700 followers set sail and landed in Sri Lanka, according to the Mahavamsa, the 5th or 6th century A.D. Pali language text written by Buddhist monks which records the island's history. Vijaya took a native princess of the yaksha or demon tribe as his wife and fathered the Sinhalese race.

The Arabs, who controlled the old trade routes between the east and west, came to the tear drop-shaped island at the southern tip of the Indian subcontinent in search of cinnamon. The aromatic spice which is the bark of a tree was once considered more valuable than gold and used in Egypt for embalming and witchcraft and in Europe as a flavouring and in religious ceremonies.

By the 8th century A.D. the Arabs were using a riverside settlement close to present day Colombo as a shipment point and were firmly entrenched as a separate community whose descendants are the Muslims of today.

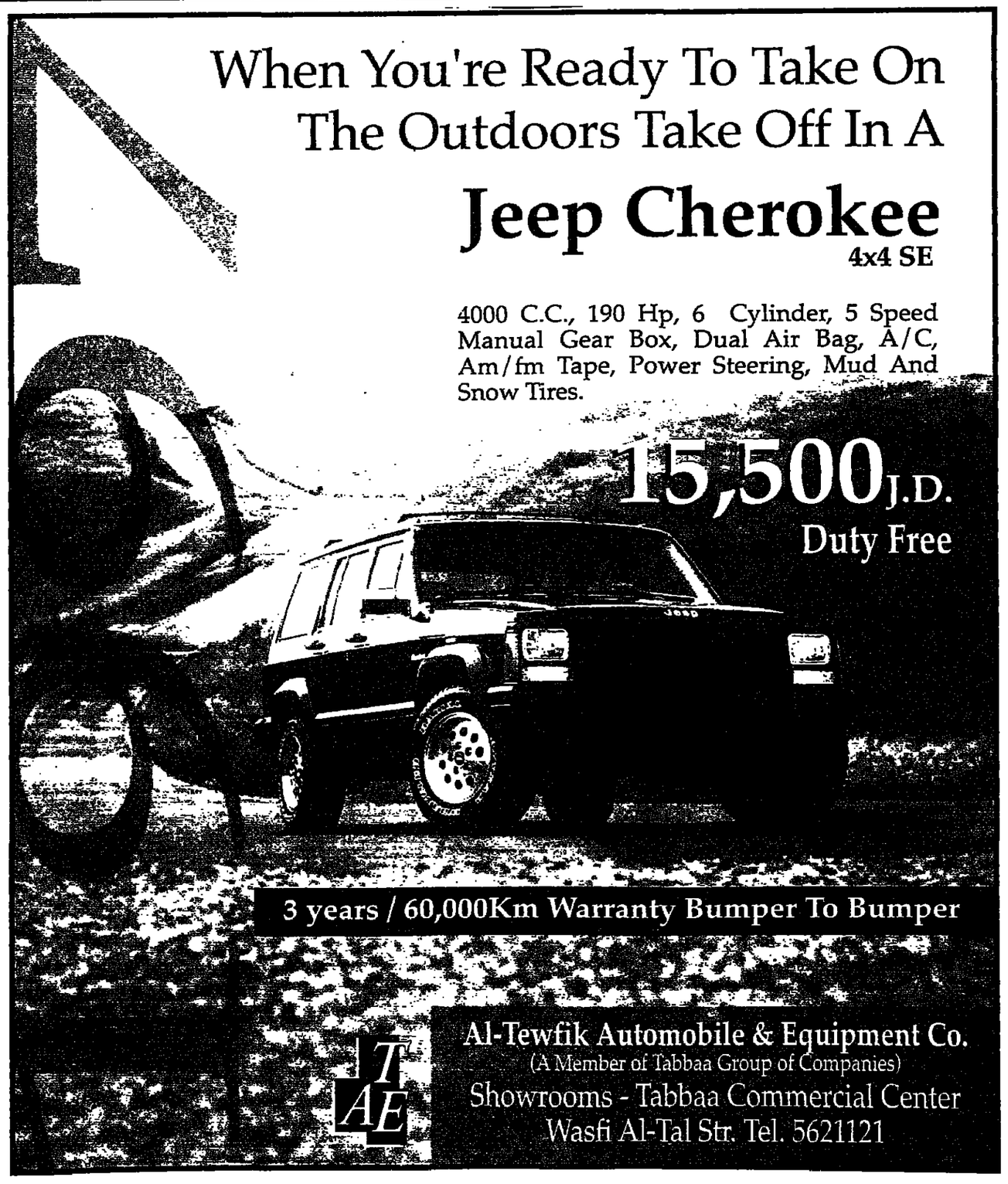
Earlier in the 5th and 6th centuries A.D. Tamils came from neighbouring India, but their arrival led to wars with the kings who ruled the island's different provinces. They are the forefathers of the Tamils who are predominantly settled in the northern part of the country. The Sri Lankan Tamils are distinct from the indentured Tamil labourers imported much later from the subcontinent by the British in the 19th century to work on their plantations and who still sweat on the tea estates.

Marco Polo, the 13th century Venetian adventurer who became Chinese Emperor Kublai Khan's emissary, used Sri Lanka as a stopover when he traversed the Silk Route.

Sri Lanka's proximity to India was also responsible for later intrusions. When the European flotillas came, beginning with Lorenzo de Almeida's Portuguese fleet in 1505, they had already docked in Indian harbours. The Portuguese who were vying with the Spanish at this time for domination of the spice trade, sought only commercial gain at first. Soon, however, more imperialistic ambitions took over and they tried to make treaties or subjugate Sinhalese and Tamil rulers. The hillcountry kingdom of Kandy protected by a ring of dense jungle held out until its king Vimala Dharma Surya allied with the Dutch who ultimately drove out and supplanted the Portuguese in 1658.

Both colonisers imposed their religious as well as legal systems, but today there remain more followers of Roman Catholicism than Calvinism. While the French Revolution was in full swing, the British were sailing from India towards Sri Lanka taking advantage of France's conquest of the Netherlands. The Dutch in Ceylon surrendered quickly, and England was given possession of the island by the 1802 Treaty of Amiens in which Britain, France, Spain and Holland carved up the colonies. The British, whose 152-year-long sway had by far the greatest influence on Sri Lanka, first established themselves in the strategic port cities. Their next ploy was to quell the Kandyan rulers. But Kandy only came under British rule only after much bloodshed, after Governor Edward Barnes built a road through the hillside forests, that is still in use today.

With the British in firm control of the whole island, they consolidated their power introducing administrative, legal, economic and cultural reforms. The British left Ceylon in 1948, a year after dividing the subcontinent and granting independence to India and Pakistan.



Jordanian-Iraqi joint economic committee to meet next week

By Ghalia Alul
Jordan Times Staff Reporter

AMMAN — The Jordanian-Iraqi joint economic committee will meet in Amman on Feb. 15 amid attempts by industrialists to increase the volume of trade with Baghdad to $300 million this year from $255 million in 1997.

Although the trade level with Iraq is expected to remain unchanged from last year, official sources see a possibility for an expansion to include industries that did not benefit from previous trade protocols with Iraq.

The committee is cochaired by the trade ministers in both countries.

Al Dustour daily newspaper Saturday quoted officials as saying that the Ministry of Industry and Trade is expected to reach an agreement with the Central Bank of Jordan on expanding the protocol to $300 million.

But Industry and Trade Minister Hani Mulki earlier said that any attempt to increase the trade protocol will depend on the outcome of the Amman meeting with his Iraqi counterpart Mohammad Mahdi Saleh.

Iraq has been pushing hard for expanding the volume of Jordanian imports supplied to Baghdad which is facing crippling United Nations sanctions after its 1990 invasion of Kuwait.

But Jordan says any increase will only swell Iraqi debts owed to Amman and strain hard currency reserves.

Iraq remains a main market for Jordanian industries, many of which mushroomed during Baghdad's 1980-1988 war with Tehran to cater solely for the Iraqi market. They find it difficult to sell their goods in other markets.

Jordanian exports to Iraq in 1997 accounted for 40 per cent of overall exports to other Arab countries.

The seven-year-old sanctions imposed on Iraq have banned all its exports and allowed Baghdad to import a limited list of food, medicine and other humanitarian supplies.

But the U.N. allowed Jordan to continue receiving oil supplies from Iraq because Amman had no other source of supply at concessionary terms.

Iraq last month agreed to supply Jordan with 4.8 million tonnes of oil in 1998 — its full oil needs — at half the world price under an annual oil deal with Jordan.

Iraqi President Saddam Hussein ordered that Iraq charge Jordan only $8.4 per barrel — half of Iraq's ceiling of $16.8 — which would reduce the final bill for 1998 to $300 million.

Only around $300 million to $350 million will remain for Baghdad from its oil sales to Amman and that is paid to Jordanian firms for exports of food and medicine.

'Oklah highlights IPC achievements during last year

By Hind-Lara Mango
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — In line with the globalisation of the Jordanian economy, new regulations and amendments have been introduced to improve the investment climate here. Jordan's plans to join the World Trade Organisation (WTO) has plans to prompted the government to modify the companies law and the income tax law. The new customs' law is in the final stages of being approved by the Parliament.

According to the director general of the Investment Promotion Corporation (IPC) Montaser 'Oklah, 191 new projects were approved in 1997 with a total investment of JD350.9 million compared to 251 projects approved in 1996 with a total investment of JD329.8 million.

Dr. 'Oklah told the Jordan Times that the largest chunk of projects for 1997 were in the industrial sector, followed by four other sectors: Hotel, agriculture, maritime, transport and railways, and the hospital sector.

Under the investment promotion law, another two subsectors (the conventions and exhibitions centres and the leisure and recreational compounds) were given the same facilities and exemptions provided by the law for the other five sectors.

"The inclusion of these two sectors completes the cycle in terms of complementing tourist activities here and increasing the number of days spent in Jordan," the IPC director general said.

Foreign investment in these projects, he said, amounted to 16.8 per cent of total investment. "In the last third quarter of 1997, foreign investment increased by 185 per cent compared to 1996 during the same time," Dr. 'Oklah said. He attributed this increase to amendments to the non-Jordanian investment promotion regulation. The investment promotion law has been enacted in 1996 and is described as "a state of the art law" in terms of attracting foreign investment to Jordan. Foreign investors have found this law to be flexible and transparent in terms of repatriating capital and liquidating assets, the IPC director general said.

Non-Jordanian investment is restricted to 50 per cent ownership in the construction, mining and trade and servicing sectors, Dr. Oklah said: "But in the other sectors non-Jordanians are allowed to own up to 100 per cent of the total investment in general."

The IPC director general expected 12,8721 job opportunities to be generated. Other job opportunities are expected to be generated through the Qualified Industrial Zone Agreement (QIZ) which the Kingdom signed with Israel at the Doha Economic Conference in November last year. The QIZ enables Jordanian products to penetrate the American market duty free.

Analysts grow pessimistic about Latin America's economic outlook

MEXICO CITY (AFP) — Analysts have become increasingly pessimistic about Latin America's economic outlook this year, with many cutting their growth forecasts as the effects of the Asian crisis hit the region.

Merrill Lynch senior economist Francis Freisinger has predicted that Latin American economies would grow an average of only 3.5 per cent this year — down from a 25-year high of 5.5 per cent in 1997 — because of the effects of the turmoil in Asia.

The Merrill Lynch forecast is among the more optimistic ones in international financial circles. The Washington-based Institute for International Finance on Thursday published a projection of 3.3 per cent growth for the region.

Inter-American Development Bank President Enrique Iglesias said in Rome, he expected the region to grow about three per cent and Goldman, Sachs' Jorge Mariscal told the Wall Street Journal he expected the figure to be 2.5 per cent.

Last month another Merrill Lynch economist in New York said the firm believes "Latin America will be a clear beneficiary of the Asian crisis."

However, Mr. Freisinger, in Mexico on the first stop of a tour that will also take him to Brazil and Chile, said the region's economies could be hard hit.

Brazil could see itself forced to devalue its much-defended currency, he warned, but added that it was not expected to plummet like the Asian currencies.

Guillermo Calvo, a Latin American expert at the University of Maryland, agreed: "It's possible that Brazil will have to devalue, which would harm Argentina and could cause a lot of noise."

Chile is expected to be the hardest hit by Asia's financial woes since it sells 30 per cent of its exports to the Asia-Pacific region, Mr. Calvo noted.

HOROSCOPE

FORECAST FOR SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 8, 1998

By Linda C. Black, Tribune Media Services, Inc.

ARIES: (March 21 to April 19) The thing you and your friends want to do turns out to be too expensive. Don't give up your dream, but do find another source of income. It's likely you'll come up with a creative idea tonight. An older person, somebody you don't always agree with, is most likely to think of it. Accept suggestion from everybody.

TAURUS: (April 20 to May 20) An offer you accept first thing this morning can work out well. Later in the day, it will be hard to get agreement on anything. That'll be true with your friends, your boss even your spouse. Hang on a little longer. More money should become a available tomorrow. After that, you'll notice things loosening up.

GEMINI: (May 21 to June 21) Your sweetheart makes a demand this morning that will hardly thrill you. It's one of those "If you loved me, you'd..." kind of things. In this case, it wouldn't be such a bad idea to comply. It won't cost you that much, and it means quite a bit to the other person.

CANCER: (June 22 to July 21) A loved one will give you excellent advice today. It's important to listen and learn. You don't need to do what he or she says. Just accept the coaching and make the decision. Well, that's the idea, anyway. Actually, you might be able to get away with letting the other person make a couple of the decisions, too.

LEO: (July 22 to August 21) Somebody at home is an anchor around your neck today. He or she won't go along with your ideas, perhaps for good reason. That makes it even more infuriating, since you and a partner are convinced you're right. Instead of being upset, listen. Your antagonist may see something you're avoiding.

VIRGO: (August 22 to September 22) The pace is picking up, and by tomorrow it's full speed ahead. Right now you have some time to practise and ponder. Everybody thinks you know everything, and that's fine with you. The truth is that you have to study just like everybody else, and this is the day to do it. Don't fall into the trap of simply reading comic books.

LIBRA: (September 23 to October 22) If you do a little research, you might find a good deal on something about buying real estate? If so, you need to do the homework first. You do the homework and you have a better chance of getting the home.

SCORPIO: (October 23 to November 21) You're strong, energetic and exceptionally good-looking. You'll need every bit of that extra energy to get what you want. To outwit a stubborn roommate, encourage his or her outrageous side. This person will get so crazy, you'll have free reign. You'll be the only sane one left.

SAGITTARIUS: (November 22 to December 21) Some people can be so stubborn. Your problem is that you try to please everybody. Today, that's going to be really difficult. Why don't you just please the one who signs your paycheques and worry about the other one later?

CAPRICORN: (December 22 to January 20) Schedule a breakfast date as early as possible. During the middle of the day, there will be conflict, and that's not a good time to go shopping. Well, you can if you're careful about your spending. Only go shopping with a person who's tighter with money than you are.

AQUARIUS: (January 21 to February 19) You're in a strong position. If you're in a conflict with a Scorpio, however, be careful. Scorpios like to be in control at all times, or they tend to get a little nasty. Show your mastery by letting this person have what he or she wants. Only if it's legal and within reason, of course.

PISCES: (February 20 to March 20) There might be a battle raging out there. It could involve a friend who lives far away, who's upset at being unable to do everything he or she wants. You can counsel your friend to lighten up a little bit, and that's a good idea. Do what you can to help.

Birthstone of February: Amethyst — Onyx

Royal Club
Restaurant



Featuring a breathtaking view of Amman from our Top Floor, we welcome you daily from 7:00 - 11:00pm (closed on Fridays)

Radisson SAS
HOTEL AMMAN

The difference is genuine.SM

Experience NEW delights of fine, innovative European cuisine!

Executive Chef, Knud Bundgaard proudly presents from the menu:
Spinach and Ricotta ravioli in tomato cream • Bisque of Spanish mussels • Grilled veal escalopes with apples and Calvados sauce...accompanied by an exciting selection of wines, digestives and cigars (detailed menu is available upon request).

Royal Club Restaurant - Top Floor - Radisson SAS Hotel Amman (Former Philadelphia Hotel)
Reservations recommended - Direct Tel: 06 5607200 - Fax: 06 5665160

VILLA FOR RENT

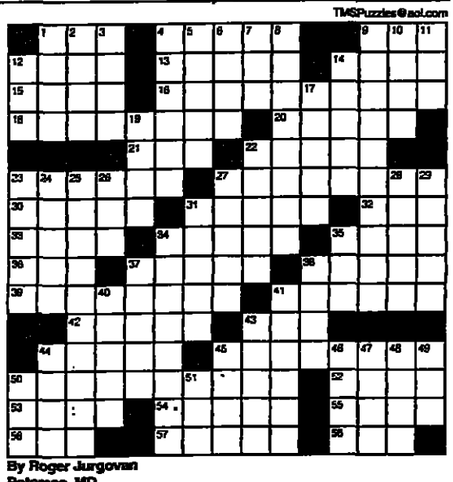
Villa for rent at Um Uthaina. near Amra Hotel.

For reference please call
Tel. 625617 / Abu Walid

THE Daily Crossword

Edited by Wayne Robert Williams

TMSPuzzles@aol.com



By Roger Jurgovan
Potomac, MD

ACROSS
1 All "F's" in this puzzle
4 Longest river in Europe
9 12 in.
12 Reprobate
13 Teheran resident
14 Opponent
15 Alternative to an apple
16 Pop back up
18 Judas __
20 Squealer
21 1994 US Open champion
22 Remarkable achievement
23 Pillage
27 Daydream
30 Wedding tokens
31 38th president
32 Haggard woman
33 Involved with
34 Acceptable
35 Singer Redding
36 Pindar poem
37 Bragg or Bliss
38 Wind
39 Internet browsers
41 Elements
42 Court team count
43 Supernatural being
44 Ride cost
45 Waste
50 Allied
52 __ Khayyam
53 Towel ID
54 Expunge
55 Vatican resident
56 Reverence
57 Dissuade
58 Stretch (out)

DOWN
1 Edgar Allan and others
2 McCarthy era abbreviation
3 Inoculators
4 Manly
5 Sandwich cookies
6 Bring up the rear
7 Plains antelope
8 Plane-trip price
9 Grotesque
10 Pawn
11 Threeway junction
12 Upstate NY school
14 Decree
17 Manage
19 Guns it in neutral
22 Baptismal basin
23 Threesomes
24 Vedas reader
25 Meddle
26 Vanity
27 Evergreen trees
28 Polish
29 Go-aheads
31 Links shout
34 Heated
35 Be in the red
37 Give the ax
38 Prevailing trend
40 Passing trends
41 Talc
43 V-formation flyers
44 Close-call comment
45 Sports number for short
46 Early Hitchcock movie
47 How not to run
48 Open-mouthed stare
49 Poetic preposition
50 Note in the scale
51 "We __ the World"

P	E	R	U		O	H	I	O		S	L	A	S	H
O	X	E	N		M	A	R	X		P	I	N	T	O
S	P	A	T		I	S	A	Y		O	A	T	E	N
T	O	P	O	F	T	H	E	M	O	R	N	I	N	G
			W	I	S	E		O	C	T	A			
S	A	L	A	D		D	A	R	E		S	U	M	P
A	D	O	R	E	S		L	O	L	A		L	O	O
M	I	D	D	L	E	O	F	N	O	W	H	E	R	E
M	E	G		S	P	A	R		T	H	O	M	A	S
S	U	E	S		T	R	E	E		I	T	A	L	Y
			E	L	U	L		A	X	L	E			
B	O	T	T	O	M	O	F	T	H	E	L	I	N	E
O	R	A	T	E		C	L	I	O		I	D	E	A
A	C	R	E	S		K	E	N	S		E	L	L	S
R	A	T	E	S		S	A	G	A		R	E	L	Y

(C)1998 Tribune Media Services, Inc. All rights reserved. 1/30/98

Peanuts



Andy Capp

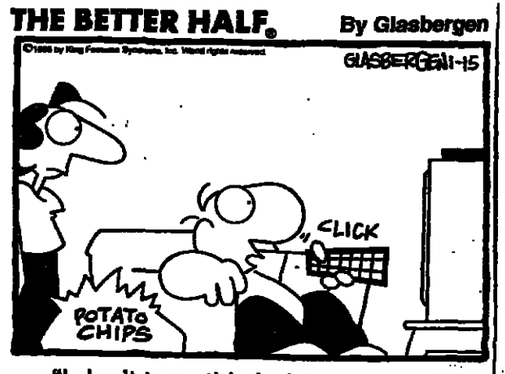


Mutt'n'Jeff



THE BETTER HALF®

By Glasbergen



"I don't tape this jerk because I like his show. I just enjoy erasing him!"

JUMBLE®

THAT SCRAMBLED WORD GAME
by Henri Arnold and Mike Argirion

Unscramble these four Jumbles, one letter to each square, to form four ordinary words.

DOTUB

©1998 Tribune Media Services, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

ZUFYZ

UNSADE

ALCIME



Now arrange the circled letters to form the surprise answer, as suggested by the above cartoon.

Answer here: () " () "

(Answers Monday)

Yesterday's Jumbles: EXPEL ROACH KITTEN SCROLL
Answer: What the iceman did when sales fell off — KEPT HIS COOL

Daily Business Beat

A review of news from the Arabic Press

Researcher blames government control for problems of potash, phosphate industries

** THE PHOSPHATE and potash companies have a special status in the Jordanian economy as their exports represent a large percentage of the Kingdom's total exports," a researcher at the Ministry of Planning has said in a study. The researcher, Ghaith Zureikat indicated that a survey he conducted showed that, despite the growth in exports in general, the contribution of the two companies to the total exports declined because of the concentration on the production of raw materials.

Due to the fluctuations in the prices of raw materials, the contribution of the two companies in the national income is not stable, Mr. Zureikat said. He added that the two firms are not backed by a network of supporting and related industries. The study attributed this situation to the government's control over the companies as the state owns 54 per cent in the potash company and 69 per cent in the phosphate industry.

"This control created a number of problems such as imposing the hiring of additional numbers of workers each year without having any real need for enlarging the workforce," Mr. Zureikat said. "The government also looks at the two companies as being foreign entities in the short term without incentives to reinvest in advanced projects.

According to the study, the two companies suffer from financing difficulties as the government imposes high taxes on loans and is banned by the World Bank from guaranteeing credits. "As such, and in order to invest in new projects, the firms have either to go to international banks and pay high interest or seek joint venture projects at easier terms to facilitate their interest," the researcher said.

He also indicated that the survey showed the local market was neglected by the two companies and, consequently, led to relying on outside markets which are influenced by many factors such as prices and political events.

The study called for restructuring the two industries in terms of their relations with the government and also the type of industry such as the cost level and the links with related industries. "Also, it is imperative that the infrastructure and the services be upgraded if the two companies want to develop production," the researcher stressed.

He urged the two industries to spend more on studies and research and to move towards producing products that have a higher competitive value. Mr. Zureikat concluded by highlighting the importance of formulating a national policy for joint projects so as it would not be an objective solely on its own (Al Arab Al Yawm).

REUTERS REUTERS

The Business of Information

Major Currencies & Cross Rates Prices as at 7/02/98 19:23

Currency	USD	DEM	GBP	CHF	JPY	CAD	ITL	NLG	FRF
US Dollar	-	1.8137	0.6085	1.4640	124.10	1.4320	1786.30	2.0441	6.0642
DE Mark	0.5514	-	0.3353	0.8072	68.41	0.7893	984.62	1.1270	3.3437
GB Sterling	1.6435	2.9740	-	2.3952	204.62	2.3535	2935.78	3.3595	9.9665
CH Franc	0.6831	123.80	0.4152	-	84.73	0.9775	1219.32	139.57	4.1394
JP Yen	0.0081	1.4609	0.4899	1.1792	-	1.1534	14.39	164.65	4.8845
CA Dollar	0.6983	1.2479	0.4186	1.0112	1.15	-	1231.91	1.4069	4.1831
IT Lira	0.0006	1.0152	0.3405	0.0819	1441.34	0.8015	-	11.44	3.3943
NL Guilder	0.4892	88.71	0.2975	71.62	60.67	0.7004	873.67	-	2.9660
FR Franc	0.1649	0.2989	0.1003	24.1297	20.44	0.2360	33.69	33.6900	-

Middle Eastern Currencies

Currency	USD	JOD	SAR	BAH	QAT	KUW	AED	LBP	EGP
US Dollar	-	0.7090	3.7504	0.3770	3.6410	0.3047	3.6727	1528.00	3.4125
Jordan Dinar	1.4104	-	5.2897	0.5317	5.1354	0.4298	5.1801	2155.16	4.8131
Saudi Riyal	0.2666	0.1890	-	0.1005	0.97	0.0812	0.98	407.42	0.9099
Bahrain Dinar	2.65	1.8808	9.9488	-	9.66	0.8083	9.74	4053.37	9.0524
Qatar Dinar	0.2746	0.1947	1.0300	1.0300	-	0.0837	1.01	419.66	0.9372
Kuwait Dinar	3.2819	2.3259	12.3086	1.2372	11.95	-	12.05	5014.77	0.9372
Emirates Dinar	0.2723	0.1930	1.0212	0.1026	0.9914	0.0830	-	416.04	0.9292
Lebanese/1000	0.65	0.4640	2.4545	0.2467	2.3829	0.1994	2.4036	-	2.2333
Egyptian	0.2930	0.2078	1.0990	0.1105	1.0670	0.0893	1.0762	447.77	-

Energy

Oils	Last	Previous
Brent	15.15	14.93
W. Texas	16.69	16.50
Bonny	15.15	14.93
Dubai	12.73	12.53
UL Gas	160.00	159.00

Mid-East Currencies

Currency	USD	DEM	GBP	CHF	JPY
SA Riyal	0.2666	0.4837	0.16224	0.39063	33.1027
AE Dirham	0.2723	0.49397	0.16567	0.39888	33.8032
KW Dinar	3.2819	5.95238	1.99681	4.80769	407.498
BH Dinar	0.3770	4.81232	1.61394	3.88561	329.381
CY Pound	1.8763	3.403	1.1413	2.7469	232.849

Metal Prices

Metal	Bid	Offer
Gold (oz's)	298.25	298.75
Silver (oz's)	7.24	7.27
Platinum (oz's)	395.1	397.1
AL (3 Months)	1517	1521
CU (3 Months)	1700	1705
Zinc (3 Months)	1095	1100
Lead (3 Months)	535	540
NI (3 Months)	5560	5580

Currency Deposit Rates (Bid)

Period / C'ncy	-1- Month	-3- Months	-6- Months	-9- Months	-1- Year
USD	5.49	5.51	5.53	5.55	5.56
GBP	7.38	7.37	7.37	7.25	7.37
JPY	0.41	1.12	0.48	0.50	0.50
DEM	3.39	3.44	3.38	3.44	3.83
FRF	3.74	3.47	3.56	3.64	3.72
CHF	0.93	1.01	1.11	1.23	1.53
ITL	6.12	6.02	5.69	5.39	5.13

Energy

Commodity	Last	Delivery
Coffee (c/lbs)	183.25	Spot
Cocoa ($/ton)	1595	Spot
Sugar ($/ton)	284.7	Spot
Wheat ($/ton)	0	Spot
Soya (c/lbs)	26.03	Spot
Tea (stg/kg)	225	Spot
Barley ($/bsh)	0	Spot
Rice ($/ton)	400	Spot

JOD Cross Rates

Currency	Buy	Sell
US Dollar	0.708	0.710
GB Sterling	1.1611	1.1669
DE Mark	0.3911	0.3931
CH Franc	0.4846	0.487
FR Franc	0.1167	0.1173
JP Yen	0.57	0.5729
NL Guilder	0.3471	0.3488
IT Lira	0.3959	0.3978

* Source: Central Bank of Jordan.

U.S. technology firms squeezed by Asia crisis

WASHINGTON (AFP) — U.S. technology companies are feeling the crunch from the financial turmoil in Asia, a key market for U.S. high-tech exports, analysts say.

But some observers say the crisis may have a silver lining as the region increases its use of technology to modernise its economies.

The effect of the crisis is beginning to show up in earnings, and some firms like software makers Oracle and Sybase are warning of lower profits this year at least in part because of lower exports to Asia.

Other technology groups — like semiconductor equipment maker Applied Materials, which gets 60 per cent of its sales from Asia — have seen their stock prices hammered even though they are not yet acknowledging an impact from the turmoil.

Asia and the Pacific Rim represent roughly one-third of the $150 billion in U.S. high technology exports, according to the American Electronics Association (AEA).

AEA vice president for research, Michaela Platzer, said makers of computer equipment and software expect a rocky road over the next year in Asia, but said the outlook is difficult to predict.

"There are no clear winners and losers," said Mr. Platzer. "A lot depends on how agile these companies are and what they do to position themselves."

Mr. Platzer said companies involved in software and other services may ride out the crisis better, because Asian economies need to modernise as they restructure their economies.

"We (U.S. firms) are the leaders in Internet and new technologies," she said. "For these countries to remain part of the new economy, they have to invest."

Manufacturers of personal computers and other equipment face a mixed bag, she noted: the possibility of lower-priced components because of steep declines in Asian currency, offset by the loss of exports.

A recent report by the market research group Dataquest said PC makers must "be prepared to survive a sustained period of difficult and depressed trading" in Asia, with many buyers delaying purchases.

"Early indications are that the fourth-quarter performance of the PC markets in Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand will be even more badly affected than (in) the third quarter," the report said.

Companies that manufacture in Asia may see a boost, however, as a result of the crisis, Dataquest notes. Taiwan-based Acer is one that seems to be benefiting.

"Acer ... has already indicated that a depreciation of the Taiwan dollar, although relatively minor compared with other Asian countries, should prove highly beneficial to its 1997 financial results," Dataquest said.

Some companies will inevitably be hurt by the precipitous drops in currency.

Oregon-based Lattice Semiconductor said last month that its sole Korean distributor, Woo Young Tech Co., was declared insolvent, leaving the group with up to $3.5 million in liabilities.

Sybase, a California software and services firm, downgraded its profit projection for the coming quarter, partly due to the Asian crisis. That followed a similar warning from Oracle, which gets a big chunk of its revenues from Asia.

Because of steep currency declines, Sybase went to a cash-only basis in Thailand, Malaysia, South Korea and the Philippines, said chief financial officer Jack Acosta. Sybase gets about 20 per cent of its revenues from Japan and the rest of Asia.

"We found that particularly in Thailand, customers did not want to part with their U.S. currency — they wanted to hold on to the cash to see if exchange rates became more favourable," he said.

"It wasn't customers saying they would not pay. It's a timing thing."

For those who ride out the turmoil, there may be a reward, say analysts.

The economic crisis will ultimately have a positive effect on technology industries, says a report published on the Internet by the Hong Kong-based New Century Group.

Fariz: Housing Bank should consult clients on JD1 commission

By Issam Qadamani
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — Central Bank of Jordan (CBJ) Governor Ziad Fariz Saturday said the recent Housing Bank measure imposing a JD1 commission on all accounts less than JD100 does not violate the CBJ regulations. However, he added, such a measure is a contractual provision between the bank and its clients.

In a statement to the Arabic daily Al Ra'i and the Jordan Times, Dr. Fariz said that while the Housing Bank's new policy does not constitute a violation of the CBJ regulations, the Housing Bank should not have imposed this commission without consulting its clients.

However, he said, the CBJ has officially notified the Housing Bank of the need to consult with its clients and to give them freedom of choice.

"The Housing Bank's measures are contractual ones, which require the bank to obtain the approval of its clients before imposing this commission. The bank should have given its clients the choice between accepting the new policy and maintaining their accounts with the bank or withdrawing the money and depositing them with other banks," he said.

Housing Bank clients have criticised the bank's policy, describing it as a precedent.

They said the new policy violates the terms of the contract with the bank and called on it to refund the commissions already deducted from their accounts, because they have not been officially informed of this commission.

More Americans saying life is rosier than in 1990

NEW YORK (AFP) — Nearly 47 per cent of Americans say their families are living better now than in 1990, up from 33 per cent two years ago, the private Conference Board said in a study.

Three-fourths of those surveyed said they believed that living standards had improved for wealthy households, about the same as two years ago, the New York-based board said.

Half said that women's standard of living had risen, up from 45 per cent in 1995.

According to 25 per cent those surveyed, young people are now in a better economic situation than in the early 1990s, up from 15 per cent two years ago.

Some 35 per cent of those surveyed said that the standards of living of middle-class households had fallen, the Conference Board said. Fifty per cent of those surveyed said in 1995 that the middle class was worse off than in 1990.

Thirty-three per cent of those surveyed believe that the standard of living of blacks had improved, up from 25.3 per cent in 1995. And 29 per cent thought life was better for Hispanics, up from 22 per cent in 1995.

Mitsubishi Motors see bigger losses

TOKYO (AFP) — Japan's Misubishi Motors Corp. may suffer a bigger-than-expected net group loss in the year to March due to the economic turmoil in Asia, a company spokesman has said.

The automaker is being hit hard especially by foreign exchange losses resulting from the depreciation of the Thai baht, the spokesman said.

Mitsubishi Motors said in November it expected to report a first-ever group net loss of 40 billion yen ($310 million) due to foreign exchange losses caused by the collapse of the Thai baht.

AMMAN FINANCIAL MARKET
HOUSING BANK CENTER AMMAN - SHMEISANI
TELEPHONE: 607171 / 607179
ORGANIZED MARKET SHARE PRICE LIST FOR SATURDAY 07/02/1998

	PAST 12 MONTHS HIGH	PAST 12 MONTHS LOW	COMPANY'S NAME	P / E	DIV.	NO. OF TRANS.	NO. OF SHARES	VALUE TRADED JD	OPEN PRICE	CLOSE PRICE	CHANGE
	346.000	250.000	ARAB BANK	15.2	1.21	12	620	270340	329.00	330.00	1.00+
N	2.340	1.680	JOR.NATIONAL BK.	E	0.00	20	14450	25125	1.74	1.73	.01-
S	2.680	1.650	INDUSTRIAL DEV.BK.	10.4	6.03	18	39700	68329	1.72	1.73	.01+
	5.300	4.610	THE HOUSING BK.	15.5	3.73	2	112	581	5.22	5.20	.02-
S	4.180	1.850	JOR.KUWAIT BANK	10.4	0.00	3	625	1218	1.97	1.95	.02-
	.970	.620	JOR.GULF BANK	4.0	10.29	10	23500	15970	.68	.68	-
S	4.050	2.250	JOR.ISLAMIC BANK	11.6	4.21	19	1492	3425	2.31	2.28	.03-
	1.530	1.050	UNION BK.SAV.INV.	P	0.00	2	2000	2100	1.05	1.05	-
	1.620	.870	BEIT.AL-MAL (BEITMA)	.5	17.24	2	500	435	.90	.87	.03-
	BANK SECTOR TOTALS		INDEX: 232.89 /CHG: +0.15			79	83199	387533			
	2.050	1.550	JOR.ELECTRIC PWR.	9.6	5.02	22	32358	64600	2.03	1.99	.04-
	1.550	.930	NATL. PORTFOLIO	g	0.00	4	550	558	1.02	1.01	.01-
	1.590	1.150	MID. EAST HOTELS	18.0	0.00	4	2200	2625	1.21	1.18	.03-
	4.000	2.890	ARAB INTL.INV.EDUC.	10.1	0.00	4	1350	5198	3.85	3.85	-
	1.050	.740	JORDAN EXPAT.INV.	g	0.00	2	4750	4418	.89	.93	.04+
	1.090	.900	ZARKA EDUCATION	g	0.00	3	1000	925	.94	.92	.02-
	2.160	1.630	UNIFIED CO.	7.9	6.59	5	1550	2603	1.68	1.67	.01-
	SERVICE SECTOR TOTALS		INDEX: 116.26 /CHG: -0.53			44	43758	80926			
	4.450	2.750	JOR. CEMENT FACT.	14.4	3.82	4	568	1636	2.90	2.98	.02-
	7.050	5.620	ARAB POTASH CO.	14.0	3.32	3	280	1602	5.75	5.76	.01+
	11.160	9.200	JOR. PETROL.REFINARY	10.0	8.66	11	1028	10575	10.29	10.28	.01-
	1.410	1.040	WOOLEN INDUSTRIES	10.5	8.26	1	750	908	1.27	1.21	.06-
	7.350	5.800	JOR.WORSTED MILLS	10.7	3.01	1	57250	380713	6.63	6.65	.02+
	4.700	3.440	ARAB PHARM. MANF.	12.3	4.49	48	13295	58659	4.40	4.45	.05+
	6.000	4.400	DAR ALDAWA DV.INV.	14.0	4.38	6	3250	18633	5.80	5.71	.09-
+	1.200	.730	ARAB PAPER CONV.TRD.	21.4	0.00	4	750	527	.73	.70	.03-
	1.120	.370	INTERMED.PETRO.CHEM.	g	0.00	3	3250	1365	.42	.42	-
	.790	.530	JOR. SULPHO-CHEM	g	0.00	2	4350	2523	.58	.58	-
	1.610	1.150	ARAB PHARM.CHEM.	15.4	5.79	5	3650	4417	1.21	1.21	-
S	1.800	.820	UNIV. MODN.INDS.	P	.26	13	4500	3695	.83	.82	.01-
	1.410	.690	JOR.INDS.RESOURCES	10.1	13.33	4	1000	750	.75	.75	-
	.960	.810	JOR. NEW CABLE CO.	16.3	0.00	6	6750	6008	.90	.89	.01-
	1.900	1.300	EL -CAY READY WEAR	45.7	0.00	2	900	1165	1.31	1.30	.01-
	1.260	1.080	INTL. TOBACCO	6.6	0.00	2	2040	2446	1.20	1.20	-
	1.200	.860	UNION CH. & VEG.	45.5	0.00	2	1000	1000	1.02	1.00	.02-
	.810	.690	JORDAN STEEL	31.2	7.25	1	250	173	.69	.69	-
	.840	.570	MID.EAST COMPLEX	7.5	16.39	23	33800	20698	.61	.61	-
	INDUSTRIAL SECTOR TOTALS		INDEX: 110.45 /CHG: -0.08			143	138711	517547			
	GRAND TOTAL		INDEX: 166.68 /CHG: +0.03			266	265668	986006			

PARALLEL MARKET SHARE PRICE LIST FOR SATURDAY 07/02/1998

N	1.050	.990	EXPORT & FIN.BNK.75%	E	0.00	7	28047	27004	1.00	.99	.01-
	.610	.340	JOR.TRADE FAC.	9.6	0.00	5	13250	4770	.37	.36	.01-
	.800	.660	UNION INV. 50%	g	0.00	9	18750	3750	.70	.70	-
	.590	.360	ARAB FIN.INVEST.	g	0.00	27	608300	362776	.59	.56	.03-
N	1.000	.720	AL-SHARQ INV.CO.	P	0.00	5	50000	46000	.94	.92	.02-
	.780	.610	AL-DAWLIYAH 75%	66.2	0.00	1	5000	2200	.70	.68	.01-
N	1.100	1.000	SPECIALIZED JOR.75%	E	0.00	1	500	455	1.10	1.16	.06+
N	2.220	1.050	CENTURY INV. GROUP	E	0.00	5	50000	97500	2.05	1.95	.10-
	.640	.440	ARAB FOOD & MED.	g	0.00	1	2500	1540	.45	.44	.01-
	.500	.270	ARAB INTL.INV.TRD.	33.1	0.00	3	1250	335	.27	.27	-
	.750	.380	NATL.MULT.ENG.NAMICO	g	0.00	72	217600	84914	.39	.39	-
	.730	.550	RAZI PHARM.	E	0.00	2	312	215	.71	.69	.02-
	.470	.240	INDS. ENG.	g	0.00	7	1745	478	.28	.27	.01-
N	.950	.560	ADVANCED PHARMA.IND.	E	0.00	11	7700	4312	.56	.56	-
	.820	.490	NATL. POULTRY	E	0.00	10	26750	14550	.55	.54	.01-
N	1.000	.660	NAT.ALUMINIUM. 75%	91.8	0.00	2	1500	615	.67	.66	.01-
N	1.310	1.000	NUTRIDAR	E	0.00	9	3650	3961	1.09	1.08	.01-
	GRAND TOTAL					180	1037931	649421			

I : New 12 months high
+ : New 12 months low
S : Stock dividend during the past 12 months
N : Listed during the past 12 months
P : P/E ratio is 100 or more
g : Negative P/E
E : Earning is zero or N/A for the most recent year

JORDAN MARKETPLACE *** JORDAN MARKETPLACE *** JORDAN MARKETPLACE

DAJANI Jewellers. Gems of the world 18-21 & 22 k. Gold. IN JORDAN - EGYPT & BRAZIL
Amman, Amra Forum Hotel Shops 6th Circle.

Area: 200 sq.m.
Consists of
3 bedrooms,
3 bathrooms.
Location: Abdoun.
Abdoun Real Estate
Tel.: 5920605 / 5920609
Fax: 5932605

STUDIO HAIG
Professional quality in 1 hour service
Develop your colour film at our shop and get:
* JUMBO photo size 30% larger.
* Free enlargement 20 x 30 cm.
Shmeisani - Opposite Grindlays Bank.
Phone: 604042
Sweifieh Tel: 823891

CROWN HOTEL
INDOOR HEATED SWIMMING POOL
SAUNA, JACUZZI & MASSAGE
FITNESS ROOM
TENNIS & SQUASH COURTS
Tel.: 758180
Radio & TV station RD.

FOR RENT
Apartments & Villas Deluxe in Amman
SANABEL
Real Estate
Sweifiyeh
Hajarat Complex
Tel. 864230 — 865167

Your Address In Amman
CRYSTAL
Quality Serviced Suites
* One & Two Bedrooms * Fully Equipped Kitchenettes * Daily & Long Stay * Reasonable Rates
5th Circle
Tel. 5692672 - Fax: 5674551

TO ADVERTISE IN THIS SECTION CALL
5667171 EXT. 223
OR
5684311 - 5699634 EXT. 42

TO ADVERTISE IN THIS SECTION CALL
5667171 EXT. 223
OR
5684311 - 5699634 EXT. 42

Nagano opening ceremony blends the modern world with ancient rites

NAGANO (AP) — Against a snowy Japanese Alpine backdrop, Nagano's winter Olympics opened Saturday with an elegant blend of tradition and technology. Somber sumo wrestlers cast away evil spirits and the strains of Beethoven reverberated from a cherry blossom-shaped stadium.

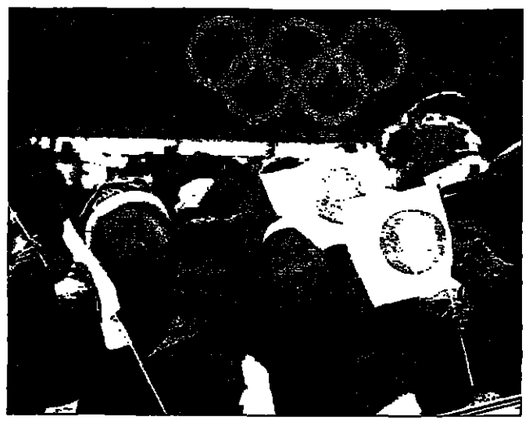
Dressed in a flowing white kimono and holding a lighted torch, Japanese figure skater Midori Ito was lifted on a platform to the stadium cauldron that will burn with the Olympic flame for the duration of the 15-day games.

Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko, her hands covered in white mittens against the chill, applauded heartily as more than 2,400 athletes from 72 nations and regions — the most ever for a Winter Olympics — paraded past their box.

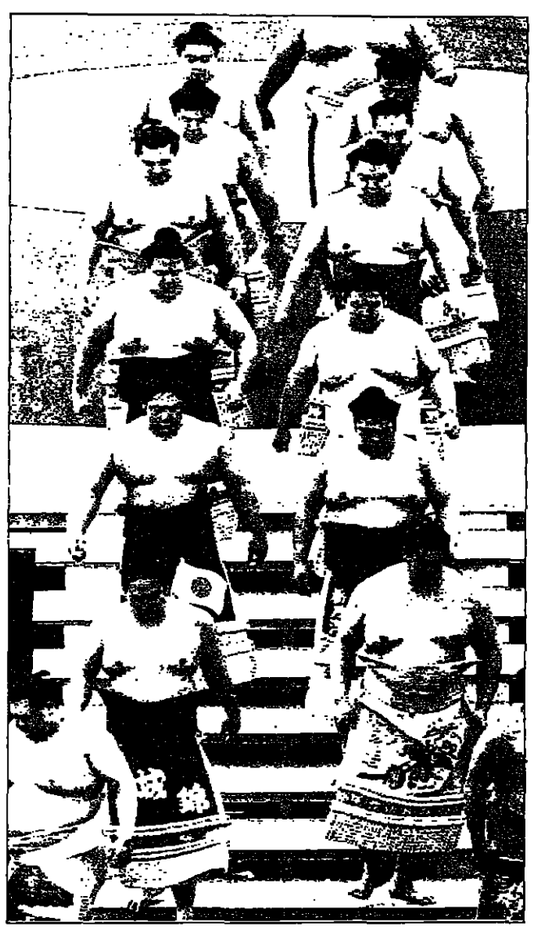
Under a light haze, the midday ceremony began with the ringing of a 17th-century bell at one of Japan's most famous Buddhist temples, Zenkoji, on a hill overlooking Nagano.

"The Olympics are finally here," said Yukio Nakamura, 57, of Nagano, who rode his bicycle to the opening ceremonies. "We've waited so long for this."

A colourful dance featured 150 Nagano children in straw raincoats and hats, a show-stopping tune called "when children rule the world," and a five-continent symphony conducted by Seiji Ozawa in a rousing rendition of "Ode to Joy" from Beethoven's Ninth Symphony.



Japanese children wave Japanese flags during the official opening ceremony of the XVIII Winter Olympic Games February 7. The world's best athletes on snow and ice from a record 72 countries will compete for 68 gold medals over the next 15 days (Reuters photo)



Sumo wrestlers wear their Kesho-mawashi (ceremonial apron) as they leave the centre stage during the opening ceremony of the XVIII Winter Olympic Games February 7 (Reuters photo)

Juan Antonio Samaranch, president of the International Olympic Committee, called on the nations participating to "observe the Olympic truce" and "foster international dialogue and diplomatic solutions to all conflicts, in an effort to bring human tragedies to an end."

While peace is one of the themes of the 1998 Games, Japan's foreign minister has expressed concern about a possible outbreak of hostilities between the United States and Iraq. Japan has asked U.N. member countries to observe a truce during the Olympics.

During Saturday's ceremony, Eishiro Saito, president of the Nagano Olympic Organizing Committee, said: "I sincerely hope that these games from the heart will achieve such splendid heights that they will ... be talked of for generations to come."

As always, the opening festivities centred around the traditional parade of athletes into the stadium, beginning with the founder of the Games, Greece, and ending with this year's host, Japan, each country's flag was carried by a hand-picked team representative, the athletes marching behind in colourful winter outfits.

Children wearing the colours of the team they accompanied were joined by a sumo wrestler chaperone dressed in Japanese vestments, their long hair in a tight bun, sumo-style. It was a like a fashion parade.

Best outfit? Perhaps Australia's delegation, in their bush-style, thigh-length, rust-coloured jackets and hats; the French team in snazzy red-and-blue coats and fashionable gloves; the Lithuanian team in lush ankle-length green jackets; and the Slovenia athletes, in their mountain-motif ski coats.

While the U.S. delegation marched with most of their 196 athletes, some contingents were small. Tropical Brazil, one of the world's most populous countries, had only two marchers.

The crowd of 50,000 at Minami Nagano Sports Park gave their heartiest welcome to the Japanese delegation. The Americans and Canadian also drew large ovations as they marched around the stadium.

When Italy's team entered the arena, their supporters in the bleachers held up scores of flashcards in the country's colours of green, white and red.

Security was tight, with plainclothes officers in the stands and Japanese police in yellow-and-blue jumpsuits patrolling the apple orchards outside the stadium. Inside, announcers asked the crowd to report any unaccompanied bags or parcels to authorities.

The security concerns stem partly from a leftist rocket attack Monday on the cargo area at Tokyo's Narita Airport that injured one worker.

Bundled in winter coats, men, women and children standing six deep lined the streets outside the stadium Saturday, waving Japan's red-and-white rising sun flag.

The nearly two-hour ceremony highlighted Japan's rich cultural history: sumo wrestlers performed a ground-stamping ritual meant to drive evil away, and mountain villagers from the suwa region raised eight rough-hewn, two-ton wooden pillars in an ancient purification rite.

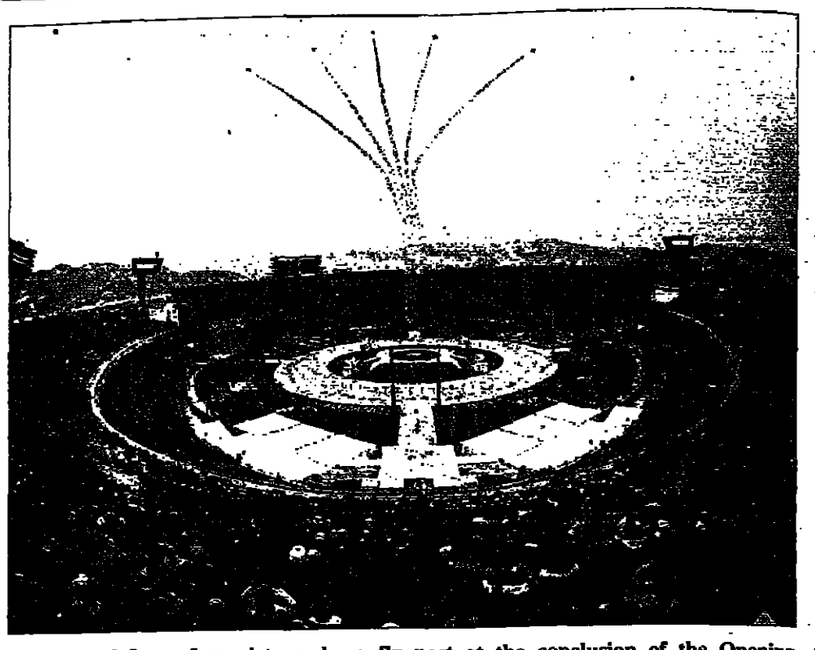
Shouts of "akebono," the 225-kilo Hawaiian-born sumo great, echoed from the stands as he entered the arena wearing traditional sumo garb — only a loincloth covering his body and no shoes — in the crisp February chill.

Later, the songstress Ryoko Moriyama, together with children in brightly coloured costumes, performed a beautiful adaptation of Andrew Lloyd Webber's song "When Children Rule the World," in Japanese and English.

Conductor Ozawa warmed up the crowd like a concert rock star, but with a truly international flair, urging the audience in Japanese and English to join in singing the German refrain of the ceremony's main tune, Beethoven's "Ode to Joy."

Hundreds of singers at Berlin's Brandenburg Gate, the Sydney Opera House in Australia, the general assembly hall of the United Nations in New York, the Shenwu Gate of the forbidden city of Beijing and from South Africa were linked by satellite TV to lend their voices to the effort.

At the end of the ceremony, Japanese fighter planes roared over the stadium, leaving a trail of rainbow-coloured smoke in the afternoon sky.



Japanese defence force jets make a fly past at the conclusion of the Opening Ceremony of the XVIII Olympic Winter Games February 7. Athletes from 72 countries will compete in their respective sports for the next two weeks (Reuters photo)

Moon triumphs in adversity to make the world a better place

NAGANO (AFP) — He won't make the podium but Chris Moon, one of the stars of Saturday's Olympic opening ceremony here, surely deserves a medal for courage in adversity, overcoming appalling injuries to lead the fight against anti-personnel mines.

Moon, who lost part of his right arm and right leg clearing mines in Mozambique in 1995, was one of the final torch bearers on the day the Olympic flame sparked into life in Nagano in recognition of his tireless work to persuade the world's politicians to ban the deadly weapons.

The tough Englishman brought a lump to the throat of many watching when he ran energetically into the arena with the aid of his artificial leg to be warmly applauded by the crowd and Japanese Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko in particular.

Afterwards, Moon, who defied his handicap to run the London Marathon in 1996, later explained the rationale behind his tenacious struggle to bring the landmine issue into public consciousness.

"It's about realizing that ordinary people can do things that make things better and can do things that make a difference," he said.

Moon's campaigning led to a firm friendship with the late Princess Diana, who likewise was a vociferous critic of mines.

Nobel Peace Prize laureate Jody Williams, who looked on as Moon took centre stage in Nagano, lent further weight to Moon's call for global abolition of mines.

Williams, head of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines and who helped to persuade 123 countries to sign last December's landmine ban treaty in Ottawa, praised the role of the Olympic movement in promoting international understanding.

"The Olympics are a symbol of peace when countries come together with one goal," said Williams, who recently visited the mine-laden Korean border before calling on Seoul to sign the global treaty banning the deadly weapon.

Around a million South Korean mines line the south side of the Demilitarised zone marking off the North from the South.

Despite the Ottowa treaty, a mere four countries have actually ratified the agreement, which cannot come into force unless at least 40 nations do so.



Land mine victim Chris Moon holds up the Olympic Flame at the end of the opening ceremony of XVIII Winter Olympic Games (Reuters photo)

Ice hockey players start off Winter Games

NAGANO (AP) — From the finery and folkways of Japanese ceremony, the Olympics turned Saturday to the cut and thrust of skis and skates in the race for medals of gold dust on lacquer, another Japanese touch.

Even before some of the pros of the NHL arrived to turn Olympic ice hockey into a real world tournament, eight teams began contesting for two places in the medal round against the big six — Canada, Sweden, the United States, the Czech Republic, Finland and Russia. Slovakia, which finished sixth in the 1994 Olympics, settled for a surprising 2-2 draw with Austria. Kazakstan rallied from a 3-1 deficit to beat Italy 5-3.

Later Saturday, Germany faced Japan, and France met Belarus.

There also was racing on the men's downhill ski course, not yet for medals but, for the Austrians, a place in the starting lineup.

A 17th-century temple gong sounded the opening note of Saturday's ceremonies and choirs on five continents — combined through a television hookup — sang the last chord. In between, some 2,400 athletes from 72 nations marched in, making this the biggest Winter Olympics ever.

On downtown Nagano streets, about 150 marchers denounced the Olympics as a waste of natural resources and taxpayers' money.

"What's the point of fussing over one-hundredth of a second?" asked one protester, Kazuko Magumo, 51, "and the tickets are so expensive, the Games aren't for regular people, a family can't go."

But 50,000 people attended the opening ceremonies and cheered as 1992 figure skating gold medalist Midori Ito, resplendent in a flowing white kimono, was lifted on a platform to light the Olympic flame in a giant cauldron built to look like an ancient torch fashioned from tree branches.

The Japanese had no hope of duplicating the last winter host's success. In 1994 at Lillehammer, the Norwegians won the most medals — 26, including 10 gold — and touched off massive celebrations.

Japan's best chances for some of the 68 golds at stake here were in speedskating, ski jumping and Nordic combined, involving both jumping and cross-country skiing.

Two sports make their Olympic debut Sunday — women's ice hockey and the free-spirited realm of snowboarding, competition begins Monday in the third of the new medal sports — curling.

Four gold medals will be contested Sunday.

The race for the prestigious men's downhill gold medal will be run on a course that caused years of controversy in preparations for the games. Yielding at the last minute to ski associations' insistence that lengthening the course would not harm the environment, organizers added about 80 meters.

But some skiers have insisted that the run still is too slow.

Among them is world cup leader Hermann Maier of the formidable Austrian team, which had trouble deciding which four of its eight downhill skiers could start. Maier, who has won 20 of the 30 World Cup events this season, and downhill standings leader Andreas Schifferer were automatic choices. Hannes Trinkl and Fritz Strobl won spots by skiing fastest in training runs Friday and Saturday.

The Dutch are favourites in men's speedskating, which begins Sunday with the men's 5,000-metre race, competitors will be using the revolutionary clap skates with a hinged toe for the first time at the Olympics.

In Lillehammer four years ago, they were limited to one silver and three bronze medals, but that was largely because Norway's Johan Olav Koss swept the three long-distance races, breaking world records in each.

For Sunday's race, the Dutch have current world record holder Gianni Romme and European all-around champion Rintje Ritsma.

Joining Ritsma in the ranks of standouts who have yet to win an individual Olympic gold is Russian cross-country skier Yelena Vaelbe, who has her next chance Sunday in the women's 15-kilometre race.

Vaelbe won her fifth overall title on the world cup circuit last season, at last year's World Championships, she became the first woman to sweep all five gold medals.

One of her main rivals is Italian Stefanie Belmondo, who says she is hopeful, but "it's a very, very tough course, there are a lot of very difficult climbs and then some very fast downhill portions."

The Olympic debut of snowboarding follows the sport's acceptance into the mainstream, after a period when snowboarders were considered reckless daredevils and banned from many ski resorts.

Favourites in Sunday's men's giant slalom include Austrians Martin Freinademetz and Deiter Happ, and Canada's Mark Fawcett.



Japanese performers dance around an inflatable planet Earth during the official opening ceremony of the XVIII Winter Olympic Games February 7 (Reuters photo)

TODAY AT

CINEMA TEL:634144
PHILADELPHIA "1"
Pierce Brosnan as James Bond
007...TOMORROW NEVER DIES
Shows: 12:30, 3:30, 6:15, 8:30, 10:30

CINEMA TEL:634144
PHILADELPHIA "2"
PINOCCHIO
Shows: 12:30, 3:30
THE PEACEMAKER
Shows: 6:15, 8:30, 10:30

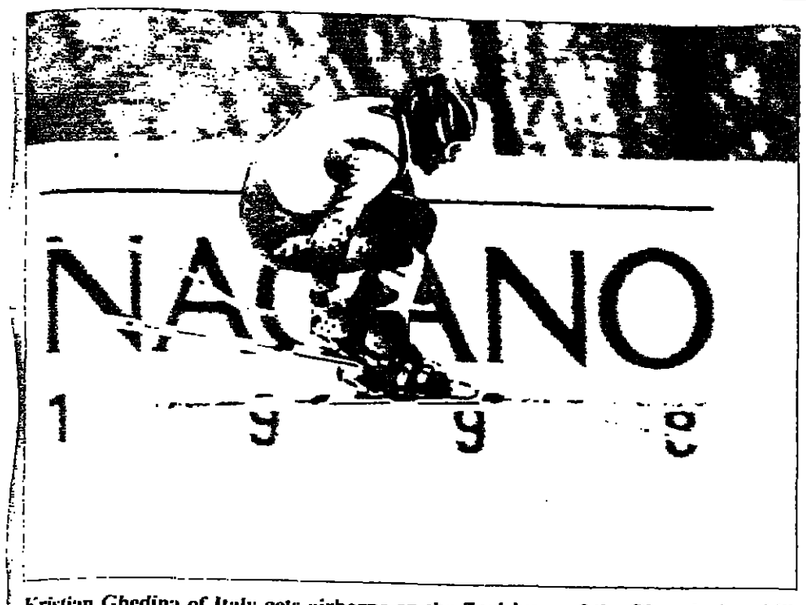
CINEMA TEL:5699238
PLAZA
STARSHIP TROOPERS
Shows: 3:00, 6:30, 8:30, 10:30
GEORGE OF THE JUNGLE
Shows: 12:00, 1:30, 5:00

CINEMA TEL:5677420
CONCORD
CONCORD "1"
Adel Imam & Yusra ... in
RISALA ILA AL WALI
(ARABIC)
Shows: 12:30, 3:30, 6:00, 8:15, 10:30
CONCORD "2"
MR. BEAN
Shows: 3:30, 6:30, 8:30, 10:30

CINEMA TEL: 079 33430
GALLERIA 2
ABDOUN
Adel Imam & Yusra ... in
RISALA ILA AL WALI
(ARABIC)
Shows: 6:00, 8:15, 10:30

CINEMA TEL: 079 33430
GALLERIA 1
ABDOUN
SPEED 2
Shows: 12:30, 3:30, 8:30, 10:30
HOME ALONE 3
Shows: 12:30, 3:30, 6:30

Hisham Yanes Theatre
TEL: 625155
NOW ON DAILY
THE GOVERNMENT IN THE SERVICE OF PEOPLE
Starring Hisham Yanes and Amal Dabbas
For reservations call: 640155, 625155



Kristian Ghedina of Italy gets airborne on the final jump of the Olympic downhill course during the third and final training session February 7. The Olympic Downhill race is scheduled for February 8 (Reuters photo)

Fog threatening men's downhill

HAKUBA (AFP) — Fog and resulting poor visibility threaten the postponement of the men's Olympic downhill, race organisers admitted here Saturday evening.

"I'm afraid the situation doesn't look too favourable," said organising committee sports director Tsunekazu Takeda.

The race is scheduled to begin at 10.15 a.m. local time (01.15 GMT) but Takeda said a delay of as much as three hours would force the postponement of the Games' blue riband race at the Happo'one course to Monday.

He said there was no question of shortening the course and trying to hold the event Sunday at a lower starting point.

Organisers also warned that Sunday's race could also be disrupted by heavy snow, forecast to arrived within the next few hours.

Because any delay will cause havoc on the whole schedule at Hakuba, the ski managers have drawn up 40 different schedules in case races are postponed because of bad weather.

"We will be lucky if we get fine weather for four days out of all days set aside for the competitions," said an official.

Under one scenario, the men's and women's downhills could be held on the same day.

Cross-country, freestyle, snowboard and luge events are set to go ahead over the weekend as planned, according to Takeda.

Olympics to act swifter on drugs cheats

NAGANO (AFP) — International Olympic Committee Medical Commission president Alexandre de Merode wants to impose bans on drugs offenders after just one test.

"We have been forced to accept that the current laws are not adapted to scientific reality," he said Saturday.

"We hope to drop the second sample tests before the Sydney Olympics," he added.

His Commission approved his proposal on Saturday.

It will now go before the Executive Board for approval and could be brought into effect after next year's session.

The International Amateur Athletic Federation has already done away with second sample tests, which drag out the procedures, and sanction drugs offenders after the first positive test.

"Second tests practically never overturn the results of the first test," said Jacques Rogge, the Medical Commission vice-president who was this week elected to the Executive Board.

"This way we make some savings, which we can use elsewhere, and it makes the whole process a lot simpler," he added.



Steffi Graf

Steffi Graf to make comeback next week

BERLIN (AP) — Steffi Graf's manager said Friday the tennis star will make her oft-delayed comeback from a knee injury at next week's WTA tournament in Paris.

"Steffi doesn't have any pain any more — her injury is fully cured," said Hans Engert, who added Graf already had entered the tournament which begins Monday.

The former No. 1 in the world was scheduled to play this week's Pan Pacific Open, but withdrew when her surgically repaired knee flared up again.

Graf, 28, has not played since losing to Amanda Coetzer in the quarterfinals of the French Open in June. Her left knee was operated upon shortly after that defeat.

Her knee problems began in Tokyo last year, when she was forced to drop out of the final against Martina Hingis. Since then, the seven-time Wimbledon champion had planned several comebacks, including the Australian Open, but withdrew each time.

Although Graf dominated women's tennis for a decade, a new generation of players has emerged, with hingis taking over the No. 1 spot.

Her knee problems began in Tokyo last year, when she was forced to drop out of the final against Hingis.

SPORTS IN BRIEF

Komen breaks world record

BUDAPEST (AFP) — Kenya's 5,000 metres outdoor world champion Daniel Komen broke the indoor 3,000 metres world record here on Friday winning in a time of 7 minutes 24.89 seconds. The 21-year-old Kenyan broke the old record of 7min 26.14secs set this year by Haile Gebrselassie of Ethiopia in Karlsruhe on January 25. Komen, who picked up a 15,000 dollar check for breaking the record, took the lead off his pacemaking compatriot David Kisang at the 1200 metres mark and stormed home to slice almost two seconds off the old mark — *Gebrselassie is due to try for the 1,500 metres world* record on Sunday in Ghent.

Africans could pose problems — Platini

OUAGADOUGOU (AFP) — Former French footballing legend Michel Platini, president of this year's World Cup organising committee, said on Friday that both Morocco and Tunisia will pose problems for Brazil and England. The 42-year-old Platini, who inspired France to the 1984 European championship but failed to coach them beyond the group stage of the 1992 finals, said that Brazil were still the favourites but they will need to be on their guard against Morocco, who are in the same Group A in the first round. "Because a lot of the Moroccan and Tunisian players play in France they will be more at home in the conditions than the Brazilians or the English (who are in Group G with Tunisia) and are capable of causing an upset," Platini, who is here for the African Nations Cup, said. "However, the Brazilians play the best football and have the two best strikers (Ronaldo and Romario) so they should retain the trophy," he added.

Man. United sign player for the future

LONDON (AFP) — Manchester United feel they have found a player for the future in 17-year-old Erlend Hanstveit. The champions aim to sign the centre-half from Brann Bergen, but he is to remain with his Norwegian club on loan and will not officially become a United player until 2001. United boss Alex Ferguson explained: "We will have an arrangement with Brann Bergen that he is farmed out to them. "He's a centre-half and one who, we think, has very good potential.

Kafelnikov, Enqvist advance

MARSEILLE (AP) — Top-seeded Yevgeny Kafelnikov, of Russia, proceeded to the semi-finals of the ATP Marseille indoors tennis tournament Friday by defeating unseeded Arnaud Clement of France 6-2, 3-6, 6-4. He will face Mikael Tillstrom of Sweden, who needed three sets to get by Arnaud Boetsch of France 4-6, 6-0, 7-6 (7-2). No. 6 seed Thomas Enqvist of Sweden also made the semi-finals after a few bumps in his match with fellow Swede Magnus Gustafsson, 6-2, 1-6, 6-3. Enqvist will take on No. 2 seed Richard Krajicek of the Netherlands, who beat Czech player Daniel Vacek 4-6, 6-4, 6-4. In the only doubles match played, Jullian Alonso of spain and Gustavo Kuerten of Brazil defeated Spaniard Alberto Martin and Australian Paul Kilderry, 6-2, 6-4.

Bird, who didn't want to be at All-Star game, grins and bears it

NEW YORK (AP) — Most of the All-Star participants gathered in one room, and the one who didn't want to be there was perhaps the best player of them all.

He was the guy with the suit jacket covering up his golf shirt, who hasn't played competitive basketball since the 1992 Olympics and who said he takes only 30 shots every two weeks.

That guy was Larry Bird, the rookie coach of the Indiana Pacers who said he never wanted to be a part of another NBA All-Star game and had insisted he wouldn't come to New York this weekend.

Nevertheless, Bird was back on Friday — wry humor, Indiana drawl and all.

"Believe me when I tell you I never thought I'd be here, not in my wildest dreams," said the 41-year-old Bird, a 12-time All-Star from the Boston Celtics who last experienced the event's hoopla in 1990 — the last time he was healthy enough to play in the game.

"This scene is not for me. I could do without this. But it's my obligation to be here. I represent a small-market city and it would be selfish if I didn't show up," said Bird.

What Bird showed in his time with reporters was a glimpse into one of the most compelling stories of the NBA — a legend-turned-coach whose team shocked everyone by going through the first half of the season with the best record in the Eastern Conference, an accomplishment that earned bird the right to coach one of the two All-Star teams on Sunday.

"I hope the game is as good as the hype," said Bird, who initially refused to coach the game because he had made vacation plans for his family in Florida. "I'm here now and I'll enjoy it as much as I possibly can."

Reluctant icon that he is, Bird spent much of his time downplaying his coaching abilities, pumping up his assistant coaches and dispensing barbs of down-home humour with his trademark hick from French lick accent. "I'm not a good coach," he said at one point. "This is the first time I've ever done this."

Pressed on the point, he conceded just a little, and said he can "get the guys to listen and play the way that I liked to play."

"I think my players respect me, they've all seen me play and they know how I was all about winning when I did," Bird said. "So maybe that's carried over to them a little bit."

His All-Star coaching counterpart, George Karl of the Seattle Supersonics, praised Bird's influence on the Pacers and said he noticed a big difference when the two teams played Wednesday night.

"He's done a great from the standpoint of their demeanour, their toughness," said Karl, whose team beat Indiana and has the NBA's best record.

Bird has brought two of his pacers, All-Stars Reggie Miller and Rik Smits, along with him. The three made up the largest contingent from any eastern conference team. "He's relaxed, laid back, he let's you play," Miller said. "Larry's pretty cut and dried."

Bird said his hardest decision while coaching the All-Star game will be divvying up the minutes fairly. "With 12 guys and 48 minutes, it averages out to 17.1 minutes per game per player," he said. "But if I give Michael Jordan 17 minutes, I'll get killed."

The topic of Jordan and his talk of retiring was one of many Bird addressed, like many of the All-Stars, Bird was sceptical about Jordan's threat. "If it really is his last one, he deserves a lot of minutes. If he's fooling us he doesn't deserve any minutes at all."

Hingis to face Davenport in Toray Pan Pacific final

TOKYO (AFP) — World No. 1 Martina Hingis completed her double revenge mission by breezing past Iva Majoli in the semi-finals at the Toray Pan Pacific Open tennis tournament on Saturday.

The Swiss teenager, who lost to the Croat in the French Open final last season to miss out on a clean sweep of the four Grand Slam titles, gained sweet revenge for the defeat, scoring a 6-0, 6-2 victory.

Hingis, who also lost to Majoli in the semi-finals here two years ago, notched up her win-loss record against the Croat to 3-2 in major tournaments.

In the final Sunday, Hingis will take on world number two Lindsay Davenport of the United States, who outclassed Amanda Coetzer of South Africa 6-2, 6-1.

But Hingis refused to say it was "revenge" and compare her defeat on the clay court at Roland Garros with the win on the fast surface of the artificial indoor court here.

"It was a whole different story. The French Open is a Grand Slam. I came back there after an injury, I had surgery, and I wasn't playing any matches and tournaments for seven weeks," said Hingis.

"I just wasn't 100 per cent and I was so happy to be in the French Open final after the surgery, and she played great tennis.

"But I'm still happy to beat her back. I hadn't played her since the French Open and I'm happy that I'm in the final now," added Hingis.

Davenport, who missed 10 match points before finally beating the tenacious Irina Spirlea of Romania Friday, eased aside Coetzer in 41 minutes.

"In last night's match I had a lot of tension ... (it was) really a close match, and I think today I just felt a lot more relaxed, because I've gone through the close match," said the 21-year-old Atlanta Olympic champion.

Davenport and Hingis have met eight times with the Swiss winning five times, but seven of them were stretched to the final set.

"It's no easy task," said Davenport, one of only five players to defeat Hingis last season, at Los Angeles in August.

"She's played fabulous tennis this week. It's especially impressive coming after such a big win in Australia. She's obviously the best player in the world right now, she moves very well and puts the ball very deep.

"I think the chances I have to win is to attack her second serve and not let her toy with me ... she's a tendency to do that.

"I need to play aggressive to come to the net, not to be afraid to take short balls to come in. I'm gonna have to look for the right opportunity to come to the net," added the American.

Abu Shakra announces winning numbers of Christmas, Eid lottery



Rami Abu Shakra Saturday held a press conference at the Abu Shakra showroom in Gardens Street. With journalists attending, Mr. Abu Shakra drew the winning numbers for the Christmas and Eid Al Fitr lottery. The winner of the first prize was holder of coupon No. 2301 (Tania Nader). The prize was two return tickets to Paris on board Austrian Airlines and six days accommodation at a first class hotel. The results of the draw on the rest of the 19 prizes will be announced in the local press.

Elway to be back as 'king of the hill'

DENVER (AP) — John Elway plans to return for the 1998 National Football League season as "king of the hill" and help the Denver Broncos defend their Super Bowl title, his agent said.

In the past Elway has told the team, Broncos owner Pat Bowlen and coach Mike Shanahan that he will take it one year at a time, Marvin Demoff said, the quarterback has now decided he'll return for at least one more season, the agent said.

"He might end up renewing that lease after next season, but right now he's giving them a year's notice," Demoff told the Denver Post.

"It fulfils his obligation to pat to help him get a new stadium. It fulfils his obligation to mike to get someone in place. And it allows john to tour the NFL at least one more season as the king of the hill, which is exactly what he is," he said.

Team spokesman Jim Saccomano said today that the team has yet to hear from Elway himself.

"In time, john is going to let us know when John lets us know," he said. "It's certainly very well known we love our quarterback, and want him to return."

Elway, who had said before the Super Bowl that he wasn't sure if he'd be back next season, declined comment after returning from the Pro Bowl in Hawaii this week.

A FURNISHED APARTMENT IN WESTERN SHMEISANI FOR RENT

Area: 220sq.m., second floor apartment. Consists of three bedrooms, two bathrooms, guest room, spacious living room, veranda, independent central heating, telephone, maid's room, modern equipped kitchen and luxurious furniture.

Please call Tel.: 5665711, Fax 5664256

FOR RENT

Furnished/unfurnished apartments in Abdoun

Consists of 3 bedrooms, 3 bathrooms, maid's room, huge super furniture. Second floor.

Call: Addiyar Real Estate, Tel.: 5697397 & 5697497

FINANCIAL MANAGER REQUIRED

A first class private hospital in Amman is in need of a Financial Manager with the following qualifications/abilities:

1. The ability to develop the hospital's accounting, financial and administrative systems.
2. Practical experience in using computer applications associated with accounting procedures.
3. The ability to manage the hospital's resources and property.
4. Experience in budgeting and preparation of cash flow projections and projected financial statements, coupled with the ability to prepare work plans to reach the pursued objectives and follow-up effective implementation.
5. The applicant should have a bachelors degree in accounting from an accredited university (masters degree holders are given priority), and should have occupied a similar position (financial manager), preferably with a company operating in the same field, for a period not less than five years.

Interested individuals are requested to send their detailed CVs along with a recent personal photo to the following address:

Human Resources Manager
P.O. Box 926691
Amman 11110 Jordan

All applications will be treated with strictest confidentiality.

Intellectual Property Attorney

A major local law firm in the United Arab Emirates has a vacancy for qualified lawyer to join their rapidly growing, intellectual property practice. The ideal candidate will be a highly motivated, independent professional with a minimum of 2 years PQE experience in the area of Intellectual Property Law.
He/She will be capable in conducting searches and design evaluations, preparing and filing applications, portfolio maintenance, transferring title, preparing licences and assignments, drafting franchise, distributorship and joint-venture agreements and coordinating registration programmes. Other requirements: Fluency in both Arabic and English languages and a law degree from a reputable institution.
The firm offers an attractive tax free remuneration package, housing and transportation allowances, medical and life insurance, annual air ticket, and exciting opportunities for growth.
If you are interested and meet these requirements please fax or send your cover letter and CV to the attention of the General Manager at 0971-4-313-177 or send to P.O. Box 9275, Dubai, UAE.

Furnished apartment for rent

Ground Floor of 220 m² including:

3 bedrooms - 3 bathrooms - Salon large living room - telephone line - central heating - seperate garage & garden - Basketball court - window type aircondition .

Location : Shmeisani

For details please call Omar @ 079 - 28529

Israel exploiting Iraqi crisis to boost settlements — PNA

GAZA (R) — Palestinian officials on Saturday accused Israeli Prime Minister Benyamin Netanyahu of taking advantage of the Gulf crisis to bolster Jewish settlement construction in defiance of U.S.-brokered peace deals.

Senior negotiator Saeb Erekat said he would discuss the issue with State Department officials in Washington on Monday in U.S.-Palestinian talks on the stalled peace process with Israel.

"Regarding the settlement campaign, this is a very serious matter — Netanyahu is using the Gulf crisis and the current problems in an attempt to confiscate more land for settlements and to impose facts on the ground," Mr. Erekat told reporters.

Palestinians have repeatedly accused Washington of adopting a double standard in the crisis, by demanding Iraq comply strictly with U.N. decisions on arms inspection, but refraining from pressing Israel to withdraw from occupied Arab land.

In the West Bank city of Bethlehem on Saturday, Israeli troops wounded 11 Arabs, among them three PNA (Palestine National Authority) policemen, during a march by some 1,000 Palestinians backing Iraq in its standoff with the United Nations, witnesses said.

They said troops trying to disperse the West Bank's largest pro-Iraqi demonstration since the crisis began, opened fire with rubber-coated metal bullets, hitting the three policeman, three journalists, and five other people.

Before the Israeli troops opened fire on stone-throwing demonstrators, marchers held up large placards of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein and Palestinian President Yasser Arafat, and chanted "Clinton the coward, leave Iraq alone."

Palestinian Cabinet Minister Nabil Shaath, asked if the U.N.-Iraqi face-off will affect American efforts to break a nearly year-long impasse in the peace process, said:

"I am afraid the Iraqi situation is taking over. This is a result of the U.S. trying to apply U.N. resolutions to Iraq, but not to apply U.N. resolutions [on occupied land] to Israel."

Mr. Netanyahu has ignored U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's calls for a "time-out" on settlement work to advance the peace process, which foundered last March when Israel broke ground on a Jewish enclave in Arab east Jerusalem.

The Israeli leader has also put on hold a long-delayed troop pullback in the West Bank, maintaining that soldiers will stay in place until Palestinians fulfil a list of demands headed by a clampdown on Islamist groups in PNA-ruled areas.

Allegations of accelerated Israeli settlement expansion were a focus of an overnight meeting of Palestinian President Yasser Arafat's cabinet in the self-ruled Gaza Strip.

A cabinet statement issued after the meeting said "the greatest threat to the peace process now is [Israel's] rejection of implementing the redeployment and the continuation of the settlement campaign on our occupied land."

In Israel, hit by 39 Iraqi Scud missiles during the 1991 Gulf war, fears of a renewed missile attack and debate over possible Israeli retaliation have pushed the peace process into the background.

Ms. Albright has announced that Israeli and Palestinian envoys will meet in Washington next week for fresh talks, but expectations the deadlock will be broken are low.

In a whirlwind visit to the region a week ago, Ms. Albright took both sides to task for failing to "make the difficult decisions and exercise the leadership necessary" to win a breakthrough.

Santer says Europe seeks greater role in Middle East

CAIRO (R) — European Commission President Jacques Santer said on Saturday that the Middle East peace process could best move forward if Israel's security was guaranteed and the Palestinians were able to develop their economy.

Mr. Santer was in Egypt on his first stop on a week-long tour to promote Europe's political and economic role in the Middle East, and earlier held talks with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak.

"It is very important that the people of Israel live in security. The best condition is also to give the Palestinians the right to economic development," he told a news conference.

He said Europe was spending "a large amount of money" on building a port and working on a Palestinian airport, and favoured building a corridor between Gaza and the West Bank "for free circulation of goods".

"Political relations can only be enhanced by financial and economic support," Mr. Santer said.

Mr. Santer, who is due to fly to Tel Aviv later on Saturday, said he would stress these points in his talks with Israeli Prime Minister Benyamin Netanyahu.

He is also due to visit the Palestinian self-rule areas, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon before returning to Brussels on Feb. 13.

Egypt sees itself as the patron of the Palestinians, and has repeatedly called for more European Union (EU) involvement in the peace process talks to counter what Arabs see as American bias towards Israel.

Europe has largely kept a lower profile in the political arena, leaving the United States as the main broker of efforts to get Middle East peacemaking back on track.

Mr. Santer said the EU wanted to coordinate with rather than replace the United States as peace broker.

"Europe has to play a stronger role in the peace process, not in substitution of the Americans," Mr. Santer said. "Through financial and economic help we have supported the Middle East peace process," he said.

EU is the biggest donor to the Palestinians. It has given them grants and loans worth $1.8 billion since 1993, when the Palestine Liberation Or-ganisation (PLO) and Israel signed the Oslo peace accords.

EU officials complain the money poured into the Palestinian areas was not being used as intended because of the stalemate.

"We are as pro-Palestinian as we are pro-Israel. We have to see how we can have a real balance to make a breakthrough in the political stalemate," Mr. Santer said. "We want political involvement and that's why I'm here."

Palestinian-Israeli peace talks ground to a halt last March after Israel started building a new Jewish settlement on occupied Arab lands in Jerusalem.

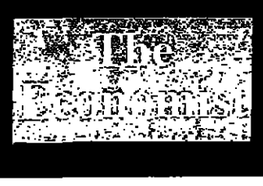
Palestinian suicide bombings and disagreements over Israeli troop withdrawal from the self-ruled West Bank deepened the crisis.

"What we're asking is that each party is fulfilling also the obligations they signed," Mr. Santer said.

Mr. Santer's first official visit to the region risks being overshadowed by the mounting crisis over Iraq, sparked by Iraq's refusal to let U.N. inspectors into sites they suspect contain components of weapons of mass destruction.

Independent.
Indispensable.
International.

Every week The Economist brings an unbiased eye and incisive comment to the most important events in the world.



Subscribe and save 10% on the newsstand price and have your copy hand delivered to your home or office every Monday morning.

Jordon Distribution Agency Co. Ltd
P.O.Box 375, Amman 11118, Jordon
Telephone: 630191/2 - 621359
Fax: 635152

Netanyahu may consider option of military strike — analysts

TEL AVIV (AFP) — Although Israeli Prime Minister Benyamin Netanyahu insists Israel does not want to get involved in the Iraqi arms crisis, military analysts said Saturday he may reserve the option of a pre-emptive strike if tensions escalate.

Jittery Israelis are already rushing for gas masks amid fears Iraq may strike against the Jewish state if the U.S. attacks Baghdad over its refusal to allow U.N. arms inspectors to search sites suspected of hiding banned weapons.

"Israel retains one policy option aside from restraint, or a retaliatory strike following an Iraqi missile attack. It's called a pre-emptive strike," Israeli military analyst Ben Caspit wrote in the Maariv newspaper.

"In one way or another, the scenario for an Israeli pre-emptive strike on Iraq is a possibility," Mr. Caspit wrote. "Should [Iraqi President] Saddam Hussein show signs of being about to launch an act of aggression, the option of an Israeli pre-emptive strike would be more viable."

Mr. Netanyahu said Friday that Israel reserved the right to retaliate if attacked by Iraqi missiles although he estimated that the risk of such a strike was minimal.

"We reserve the right of self-defence, which is a natural right of any state, any nation, under potential or real attack," he said.

"It is our assessment that the risk of Iraqi attack on Israel is low, is very low. But it is our responsibility to protect the people of Israel and to take all the measures of civil defence that are necessary."

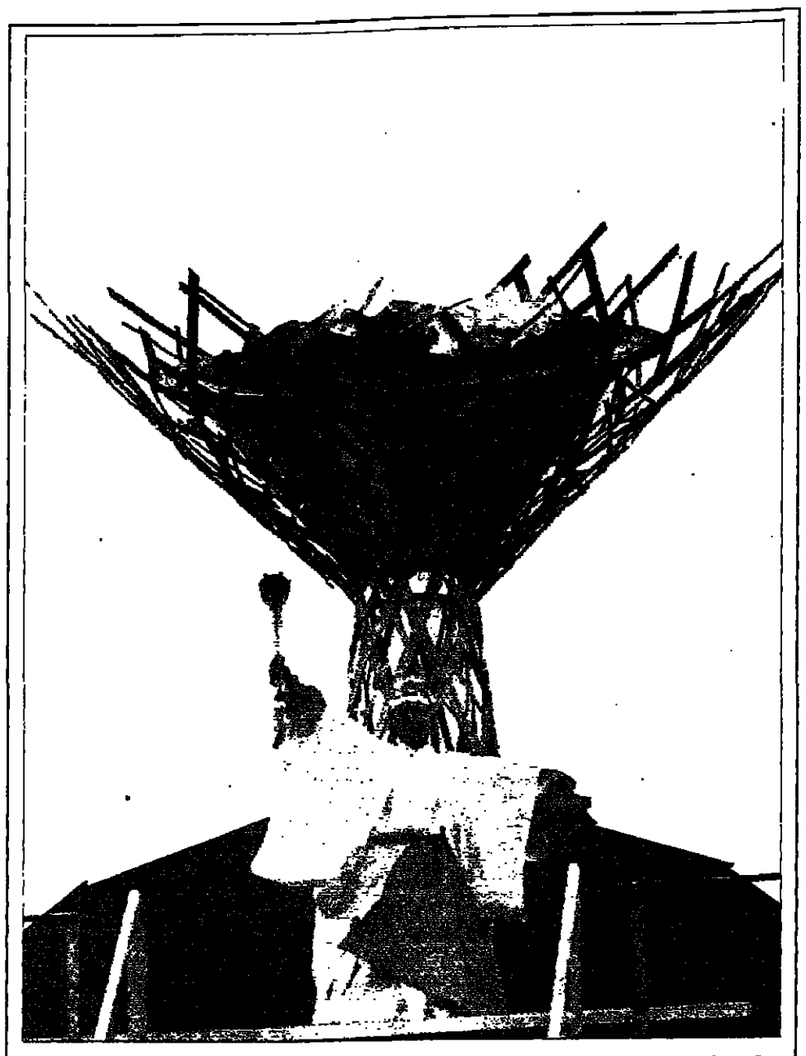
U.S. officials have repeatedly said Israel is allowed to defend itself but U.S. Defence Secretary William Cohen said Wednesday that the United States "very strongly urges the Israelis not to get involved even if attacked" by Iraq.

Mr. Netanyahu has refused to commit to total restraint but said: "We are not a part of the conflict, we have no intention to be a part of the conflict."

During the 1991 Gulf war, Israel bowed to strong U.S. pressure not to retaliate against Iraq after it fired 39 Scud missiles at Tel Aviv, killing two people. Washington's aim then was to maintain a tight Arab coalition against Iraq by keeping Israel out of the war, but it does not have such a united Arab front in the latest crisis.

Israeli security officials have estimated as "very, very small," the probability that Iraq will strike Israel in the event the United States resorts to force to get Baghdad to abide by U.N. resolutions demanding full access to suspected weapons sites.

But Mr. Netanyahu reportedly told U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright early this month that Israel reserved the right to attack Iraq if it felt the United States could not sufficiently protect the Jewish state.



LET THE GAMES START: Former Olympian Midori Ito pauses after lighting the Olympic Flame during the opening ceremony of the XVIII Winter Olympics in Nagano, Japan, Saturday (AP photo)

Sudan agrees to Libyan mediation in military dispute with Eritrea

KHARTOUM (AFP) — Sudan's President Omar Al Bashir announced Saturday that he would permit Libya to mediate in the dispute pitching Sudanese troops against Eritrean forces.

General Bashir was speaking to reporters Saturday at the airport in Khartoum, after arriving back from the Regional African Summit in the Libyan capital, Tripoli.

"We have given our consent to Colonel (Muammar) Qadhafi's initiative and have asked him to continue with it to improve our relations with Eritrea," Mr. Bashir said.

The Libyan leader earlier raised the possibility with Eritrean President Issaias Afeworki, added Gen. Bashir.

The proposal came amid strenuous denials by Eritrea of allegations that its troops had entered Sudan and were fighting alongside Sudanese rebels against the country's military junta.

But the Sudanese press Saturday quoted government officials here as saying that Eritrean troops were currently under surveillance on the common border following shell bombardments. According to the officials, the mortar attacks killed and wounded dozens of Eritrean troops. Two Sudanese soldiers and a woman were also killed, they said.

The pro-government daily Alwan quoted Mohammad Yousef Adam, commissioner of the eastern Sudanese province of Kassala, as saying that the Eritreans had built up their troops after being defeated at the Sudanese positions of Gulsa, Abu Gemul and Leffah.

At Leffah, the two countries' forces were separated by a mere 600 metres and by a kilometre at Gulsa, said the commissioner.

Kassala's Social and Cultural Affairs Minister Arefah Awad Al Kerim was quoted as saying: "All indications show that Eritrea is preparing for a new attack on Kassala."

Measures have been taken to head off such an attack, said the minister. This appeared to confirm earlier announcements by Sudanese army spokesman Abdul Rahman Siral Khetim who said his troops were "closely watching the mounting military concentrations on the eastern front."

He said his forces were "ready for expelling any act of aggression."

In his comments to reporters Saturday, Gen. Bashir took the opportunity to criticise the U.S. stance in the Iraq crisis, accusing U.S. President Bill Clinton of seeking to destroy Iraq in the "interest of a Zionist scheme" pushed by Israel.

Clinton vows 'never' to resign despite sex-and-cover-up scandal

WASHINGTON (AFP) — U.S. President Bill Clinton firmly promised that he would "never" resign Friday, even as the sex-and-cover-up scandal that has battered his presidency for weeks showed no sign of abating.

The president made the categorical statement at a joint press conference with visiting British Prime Minister Tony Blair.

When asked if the sex scandal involving a former White House intern had taken such an emotional toll that he would consider leaving office, the president firmly responded: "Never."

"You know, I was elected to do a job," said Mr. Clinton.

Mr. Clinton has denied having an affair with former White House intern Monica Lewinsky, 24, then urging her to lie about it to protect him in a separate sexual harassment suit.

As the president vowed to ride out the controversy, independent counsel Kenneth Starr — who is investigating presidential wrongdoing — rejected Mr. Clinton's charge that he was behind "illegal leaks" to the news media.

Mr. Starr suggested that the source may be close to those under investigation in the scandal.

"Fiercely aggressive representation... cannot be an excuse for smearing a lawyer through reckless accusations," Mr. Starr wrote in a letter to Clinton lawyer David Kendall.

Mr. Starr rejected the allegations as "unsupported charges," adding that his staff knew leaks were "utterly intolerable." Nevertheless he added that he had begun a probe to determine whether someone in his office was indeed responsible for the leaks.

Earlier Friday Mr. Kendall attacked Mr. Starr by describing the special prosecutor's office as being "out of control," and accusing Mr. Starr of being responsible for "a deluge of illegal leaks" of confidential information to the news media.

Mr. Kendall said he would ask a federal court on Monday to hold Mr. Starr in contempt of court for a pattern of leaks, which Mr. Kendall said were designed to intimidate witnesses and smear people.

Mr. Kendall told reporters he had sent a 15-page letter to Mr. Starr's office "documenting with particularity a deluge of illegal leaks from that office of false and misleading information."

The leaks "often appear to be a cynical attempt to pressure and intimidate witnesses, to deceive the public, and to smear people involved in the investigation," he said.

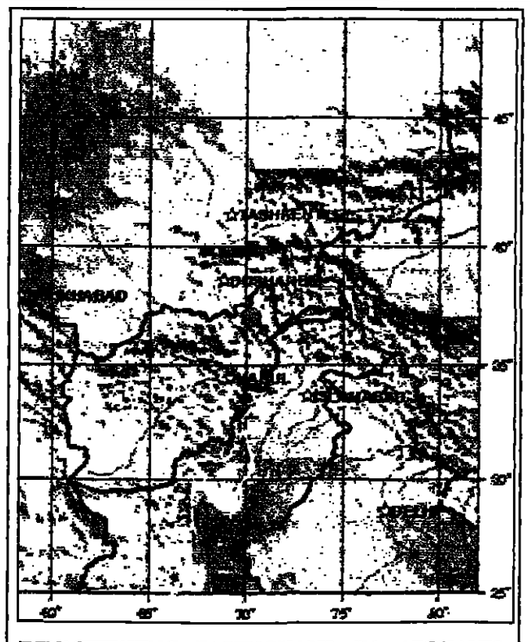
"We've seen leak after leak, which ultimately and in the fullness of time, turns out to be false information. These leaks make a mockery of the traditional rules of grand jury secrecy."

Questions about Mr. Clinton's relationship with Ms. Lewinsky dominated a press conference earlier in the day with Mr. Blair, which followed meetings on Iraq and other international matters.

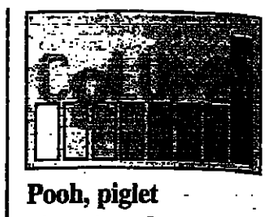
Mr. Clinton again denied the affair — as he reportedly did in a sworn court deposition — and rejected charges he asked Ms. Lewinsky to lie about their relationship.

"I never asked anybody to do anything but tell the truth," Mr. Clinton said before promising to stay in office.

The White House was angered over reports in the New York Times and Washington Post suggesting that Mr. Clinton may have tried to influence the grand jury testimony of his secretary, Betty Currie.



DEVASTITATING EARTHQUAKE IN AFGHANISTAN: This graphic from the United States Geological Survey shows the region surrounding the area of northern Afghanistan struck at 1433 GMT Wednesday by an earthquake measuring 5.6 on the Richter scale. The red dot indicates the epicentre. Sources in Afghanistan and neighbouring Tajikistan report that the death toll may exceed 4,000 (see story on page 4) (AFP photo)



Pooh, piglet at centre of repatriation question

NEW YORK (R) — The original Winnie the Pooh, piglet and other creatures from the beloved children's books sat quietly on display in New York, innocently unaware of a tussle over whether they should be returned home. Scores of people telephoned the New York Public Library, where the five stuffed animals have resided for 11 years, to inquire about their future after a member of Britain's parliament started seeking their repatriation, a library spokeswoman said. "Free the Pooh five," said a headline in London's Evening Standard newspaper after Labour representative Gwyneth Dunwoody called for the issue to be debated in parliament. "They are part of our heritage and they want to come home," the newspaper quoted her as saying.

Reagan celebrates 87th birthday

LOS ANGELES (AFP) — Former President Ronald Reagan celebrated his 87th birthday Friday with cookies and a bill signed by Bill Clinton naming Washington's national airport after him. Reagan was feted in his Los Angeles office by Girl Scouts bearing cookies. He also received congratulatory phone calls from Gerald Ford, Margaret Thatcher, Newt Gingrich and Bob Dole. But the biggest present came when Clinton signed the bill into law Friday officially changing the Washington airport's name to Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport. "Ronnie and I are honoured that the House and Senate have voted to rename [the airport]," his wife Nancy Reagan said.

Giant baby born in Hungarian hospital

BUDAPEST (AFP) — A baby boy weighing 6.25 kg was born recently in Kisvarda Hospital in southern Hungary, the Mai Nap daily newspaper said Saturday. Baby Mate Nagy, whose family name would translate as "Big," is 62 cm long, hospital doctor Andras Jakab told the newspaper. Although the infant was forced to undergo a hernia operation, he and the mother were both doing fine, Jakab said.

Cod battered on Portuguese minister's face

BRAGA (AFP) — A Portuguese minister was battered in the face with a cod as he opened an exhibition. "That'll teach you how to govern," Antonio Costa's assailant proclaimed as he slapped the minister for parliamentary affairs several times with the fish. "He must be the only Portuguese who doesn't like cod," Costa quipped after wiping his face.

San Francisco opens luxury $7 million dogpound

SAN FRANCISCO (R) — Colour TV sets in every room, a limitless supply of tennis balls and regular peer group sessions "with lots of hugs." In San Francisco, a dog's life became a whole lot easier after the city's Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) opened its new, state-of-the-art $7 million animal shelter. "There is nothing like it anywhere else in the world," said SPCA President Richard Avanzino as he meandered down "Lassie Lane," where dogs are ensconced in private, furnished apartments complete with cable television. Dogs dine on meals provided by room service and see consultants who develop lists of their "beauty requirements."